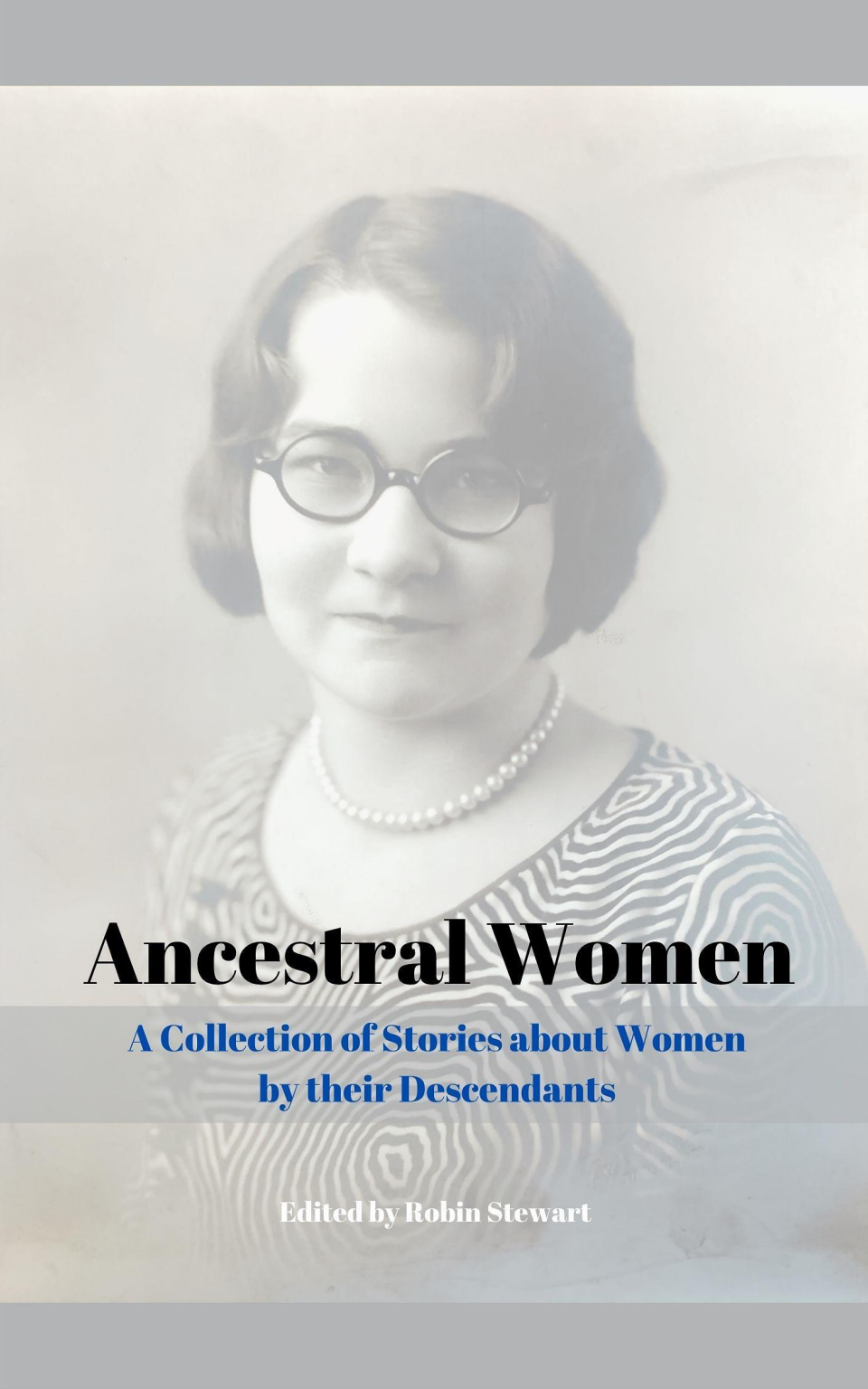




Ancestral Women

**A Collection of Stories about Women
by their Descendants**

Edited by Robin Stewart

ROBIN STEWART

Ancestral Women

*Collected Stories of Women in Family History by Their
Descendants*



First published by Genealogy Matters Press 2026

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First edition

ISBN (print): 979-8-9945434-2-9

ISBN (digital): 979-8-9945434-3-6

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

Find out more at reedsy.com

*I dedicate this collection to my ancestral women: Marjorie Ann
Sunderman, Della Convers Crowell, Sadie Marie Henderson
Sunderman, Lydia Susan Voerster, Ruth Summers Hinkson
Convers, and Lillie May Muncy Crowell.*

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Foreword

The women in this book did not expect to be remembered.

They did not keep diaries for posterity, or write letters with an eye toward the archive. They did not hold public office or lead visible movements. Most of them appear in the historical record only when an institution required it: a birth, a marriage, a census entry, a death certificate, a ship's manifest, a divorce petition. Some of them do not appear at all. One of them exists only as a percentage point in a DNA result.

And yet here they are.

This collection brings together the stories of ancestral women written by their descendants who went looking for them. The writers are genealogists, family historians, and storytellers. They work from documents and photographs, from family lore and oral tradition, from probate records and cemetery surveys and colonial-era marriage registers. What they have found, and what they have written, is not a survey of exceptional women. It is something more specific and more important: a portrait of ordinary women living through extraordinary circumstances, and the mark they left on the families that came after them.

The book is organized into four parts, each built around a different facet of ancestral women's lives.

Part 1: Rising After Loss opens the collection with stories of women who endured grief and kept going. They lost parents and children, husbands and homes, countries and languages.

They did not always recover quickly or cleanly. But they rose. The articles in this section span continents and centuries, from a French Basque family in the nineteenth century to immigrant households in early twentieth-century America, and they share a common conviction: that the ability to absorb loss and continue is itself a form of strength worth naming.

Part 2: The Women Who Carried the Family Through turns to women who became the structural center of their families, not through dramatic acts, but through sustained, invisible labor over decades. A Brooklyn woman who kept her door open through two world wars, the Depression, and the deaths of children and siblings. A soldier's wife in colonial India who traveled thousands of miles across cantonment roads, buried babies along the way, was widowed and abandoned, and then reinvented herself as an untrained midwife to feed her children. These women did not make headlines. They made households.

Part 3: Women With Agency asks a harder question: what does it mean to choose, when the available choices are few and the consequences of choosing wrong are severe? The stories here follow women who exercised agency under conditions that did not make it easy: a woman who left a violent marriage and built a business on one of London's most fashionable streets; a woman who signed a sugar plantation contract and sailed her children to Hawaii in the middle of a political standoff; a thirteen-year-old girl who crossed the Atlantic alone in steerage toward parents she had not seen in a year. These women were not free of constraint. But within whatever room they had, they acted.

Part 4: The Woman I Inherited closes the collection with the most personal question of all: what did these women leave

behind? Not in property or in the public record, but in the bodies and habits and values of the women who came after them. A grandmother's posture of showing up, no matter what. A code against gossip and for fairness, passed from mother to daughters without ever being spoken aloud. An unnamed Indian woman, most likely Eurasian, who exists only as 1% in a DNA result and yet set in motion a maternal line that stretched across two centuries of colonial India to reach the woman writing today.

Taken together, these four parts do not tell a single story. They tell dozens of stories, drawn from different families, different countries, different centuries. What connects them is not a shared history but a shared commitment: to look carefully at the women the record barely preserved, and to render them with the care and specificity they deserve.

Genealogy is often described as a hobby, a personal pursuit, a way of filling in a family tree. What the writers in this collection are doing is something more. They are practicing counter-archival work: recovering people who were systematically under-counted, unnamed, or erased, and insisting that their lives mattered. That the household a woman held together for forty years is historical. That the crossing a thirteen-year-old girl made alone in steerage is historical. That the Indian woman who gave her child a name and then disappeared from every record is historical.

The women in this book did not expect to be remembered. They are being remembered anyway.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the six writers who brought this collection to life. Each contributed original work rooted in deep research, personal memory, and a commitment to honoring the women who came before us.

Kirsten M. Max-Douglas writes at *Our Growing Family Tree*, where she traces the intertwined families of her Brooklyn and Pennsylvania roots. For this collection, Kirsten contributed essays across all four parts — following her great-grandmother Mary Plunkett Dowling, the immigration story of Anna Hurkala, and the inheritance passed down through her two grandmothers, Eva and Julia. Her work is meticulous, warm, and deeply grounded in the documentary record.

Xanthe Hall writes *X-Factored – Family Stories*, weaving together the Anglo-Indian maternal line of her family across generations in colonial India and beyond. Xanthe contributed to all four parts of this collection, bringing Martha Gill, Ada Elicia, and the unnamed Indian ancestor who lives on in Xanthe's DNA into vivid, carefully researched relief. Her writing carries both scholarly depth and personal feeling.

Melody Lassalle writes at *Mel's Genealogy Research Journal*, specializing in Azorean and Hawaiian genealogy. Melody contributed the story of Anna Jacintha Pacheco, a widow who chose immigration to Hawaii over an uncertain future in the Azores — a story of agency, courage, and survival across the

Pacific.

Anne Wendel writes *Grandma's Granny's Family Album*, exploring her family's history through photographs, records, and stories passed down through generations. Anne contributed to Part 1: *Rising After Loss*, offering a personal reflection on the ancestral women who shaped her sense of family and resilience.

Lauren Maguire writes *The Heirloom Detective: Lulu Mackenzie of the Archives*, where she pursues the records and stories behind her family lines. Lauren contributed to Part 1: *Rising After Loss*, adding her voice to the collective portrait of women who carried their families through grief and change.

Fran Davis writes *The Past, Still Present*, where she explores what the genealogical record reveals about the lives, not just the names and dates, of the people in it. Fran contributed the essay "Anne's No-Gossip Code" to Part 4, a luminous reflection on the moral inheritance passed down from her grandmother Anne Epstein Mooney.

This collection would not exist without each of these writers' generosity in sharing their research and their family stories. Thank you.

I

Rising After Loss

Loss was not an interruption in the lives of our ancestral women. For many, it was the constant against which everything else was measured. They buried children, husbands, and dreams. They kept going anyway.

Rising After Loss

The stories gathered in Part 1 come from five different families, five different centuries, and five different corners of the world. Yet each one illuminates the same quiet truth: that rising after loss rarely looks heroic. It looks like showing up. It looks like getting up before dawn, keeping the business running, crossing an ocean, hauling ash up a stairwell, and writing your name on a voter roll.

These are their stories.

Brigitte (Breilh) Mazeres, by Melody Lassalle, traces a French immigrant who lost two young children to croup, built a laundry business in Oakland alongside her husband, and then, widowed at 55 during the Depression, simply kept the doors open and the deliveries running.

Gertrude Zoeller, by Anne Wendel, places one German immigrant mother's staggering loss of six children in the context of 19th-century urban life, asking the hard question: what do you do when grief is not the exception but the rhythm of every year?

Anastasia Hlinka, by Kirsten M. Max-Douglas, follows a woman from the Carpathian foothills of Slovakia who buried two of her children in village soil, then gathered the living ones

and crossed the Atlantic to a Pennsylvania coal town, because keeping going was the only choice she had.

Josephine Sullivan, by Lauren Maguire, tells the story of an Irish-American widow in Chelsea, Manhattan, who was left pregnant and alone at 23 when tuberculosis took her husband. She became a janitress, trading backbreaking labor for rent, and kept her daughters housed, fed, and alive.

Helen Chambers (Ruegg), by Xanthe Hall, chronicles a Victorian Englishwoman in Greenwich who lost seven of her thirteen children over the course of eighteen years, outlived most of her grief, and in 1913 quietly registered to vote.

Together, these women remind us that resilience is rarely a single dramatic act. More often, it is the accumulation of ordinary days lived in the wake of extraordinary loss.

My Great Grandmother's Inner Strength

Brigitte (Breilh) Mazeres suffered many losses, but carried on with life

by Melody Lassalle

Mel's Genealogy Research Journal

<https://substack.com/@melrootsnwrites>

Brigitte Breilh, a native of Castet, France, was my paternal great grandmother. She immigrated to America in 1892 at the age of 21 on the Rotterdam. After arriving in New York, she made her way to San Francisco, California, where she easily found work in one of the French laundries.

In San Francisco, she met Charles Mazeres dit Salanave, an immigrant from Ogeu-les-Bains which was near Castet. They began courting. Charles almost blew his chance when he forgot an arranged meeting and wrote a heartfelt letter to ask for Brigitte's forgiveness. She gave him a second chance. They were

ANCESTRAL WOMEN

married at Notre Dame de Victoire Church in San Francisco on the 16th of January 1897.



Wedding photo of Charles Mazeres dit Salanave and Brigitte Breilh

The happy couple wasted no time starting a family. Their first child, Anna Madeleine, was born in October of the same year. Anna was followed by Jean Emile in 1899.

At the same time, the couple worked on pursuing their dream of owning their own French laundry. By 1901, they left San Francisco for Modesto and opened their first business.

Anna was a hearty and healthy child, but Jean was not. He became sick with croup and succumbed to the disease at the age of 3.

ANCESTRAL WOMEN



Jean is seen here with his parents and sister.

It possible the loss of their young son was the impetus for Brigitte and Charles leaving Modesto. By 1904, they were living

in Oakland and running another laundry.

A year later, Brigitte became pregnant a third time. Emilie Mathilde was born on the 12th of September 1905. Sadly, Emilie's fate was the same as Jean's. She developed croup and died at the age of 2.

Having lost 2 children to the same disease must have broken Brigitte's heart. She didn't have any children after Emilie. She poured all her love into Anna.

By 1910, the Mazeres' laundry business was doing pretty well. Brigitte worked right alongside Charles. They now owned two laundries and had their own horse and carriage for deliveries.

You can see Brigitte in the dark blouse with Charles, an unknown employee, and their daughter, Anna, at one of their Oakland laundries.

ANCESTRAL WOMEN



One of the Mazeres family French Laundries ca 1908, Oakland, California

In 1910, Anna was 13 and in school. Brigitte and Charles were active in the French immigrant community joining Sunday picnics and belonging to various French societies. This may be Anna received mandolin lessons. The instrument was having a revival within the French immigrant community.

By 1920, things were going well for the Mazeres family. They even had a dog, a St. Bernard, which tickles me. Brigitte and Anna were under 4'10". The dog must have been a handful for them.

This was a time of change. Anna no longer helped out at the laundry but was employed as a dressmaker. And, she was dating. She was seeing Jean Lassalle, an immigrant from the same village as Charles. Jean was almost 10 years Anna's senior.

Brigitte had to accept that her daughter was grown up. She was pleased when Anna accepted Jean's proposal of marriage though she knew that this would leave the house feeling empty. She shed happy tears for the couple at St. Mary's Church in Oakland when they said "I do" in 1921.



Brigitte Breilh and Charles Mazeres with their daughter Anna

In this portrait, we have Brigitte, Charles, and Anna in their

Sunday best.

This should have been the happiest time for Brigitte. She was in her early 50s and a grandmother. Anna had blessed them with a granddaughter in 1922, a grandson in 1924, and another granddaughter in 1926. Brigitte doted on her grandchildren and was so delighted when Anna and Jean decided to buy a house near by.

Instead, Charles became ill. He died on Christmas Day, 1926. He was only 58.

Brigitte could have thrown in the towel at this point. She was 55 years old and elderly by the standards of the day. She could have given up her independence and moved in with Anna.

But, she didn't. Brigitte knew the laundry business. Her home was combined with one of the laundries, so she could easily continue operations. Anna helped out when she could. Her grandson, George, made deliveries pulling a wagon around Lake Merritt.

As the Depression weighed upon the country, Brigitte survived. Even in hard times, there was always laundry to do. For a time, she ran the business and took care of her granddaughter, Dorothy. Dorothy had become sickly at the same time Anna had given birth. Brigitte took her in until she was no longer a danger to mother and baby. Dorothy became her little helper and they grew close.

She was interested in the news and kept up with current events. She loved nothing more than to argue politics with her son-in-law and get him riled up. She was thrilled when her naturalization was finalized and she was able to register to vote.

She continued to work through the 1940s. She watched

her grandchildren become adults and she welcomed her first great grandchild. Because she had lost two children of her own, Brigitte knew what Anna was feeling when her oldest son, Charles, was killed in WWII with the sinking of the USS Liscome Bay. She supported her daughter knowing only too well how painful this loss was.

She is seen here on the left with her nephew, Alexis Mazeres, daughter Anna, and great nephew, Robert Mazeres, around 1940.



Brigitte (Breilh) Mazeres with family members ca. 1940, Oakland, California. (Edited with Gemini AI to lighten a photocopy of the original)

The 1950 census shows that she was 79 and still lived alone in the house on 10th Avenue that she and Charles once shared.

She was retired now, but she never remarried.

She remained independent until her health began to fail. Only then did she move in with Jean and Anna. Sometimes her great grandchildren sat by her bedside to keep her company. She died at the age of 87, outliving her husband, Charles by almost 30 years.

Note: Charles' original surname was Mazeres dit Salanave, but he went by Mazeres in America. Anna was born with the surname Mazeres.

The Immigrant Life of Gertrude Zoeller

by Anne Wendel

Grandma's Granny's Family Album

<https://grandmasgrannysfamilyalbum.substack.com>

My Great-Grandmother Katharina Gertrude Kress Zoeller

I assumed my great-grandparents Gertrude and Theodore Zoeller were partners. His life was remarkably successful. Arriving in 1845 as a teenage farmer responsible for two younger siblings shell-shocked by the recent death of their mother onboard ship, he became a prosperous business owner and politician. From at least 1857 to 1859, he rented a store for his cabinet-making. It appears he specialized in elaborate furniture of mahogany carved with deer and fruit, representing the plenty that newly rich immigrants could afford. Theodore owned a \$100 watch (\$2000 in today's money) and a \$200 piano - during the Civil War when the government needed money, they got \$3 by taxing both.



In the shadow of Manhattan, Calvary Cemetery is where you will find many Catholics buried

Three dollars could pay for a far sadder thing than piano taxes - an infant's grave at Calvary Catholic Cemetery. In Queens, Calvary was an easy ferry ride away from the 17th Ward of Manhattan, where most immigrants lived. A contemporary wrote that funeral processions were constantly going up Fifth Avenue and crossing the East River, more than half of them for Irish children under ten.

And German babies.

I just found out this was Gertrude's life. Thirteen pregnancies!

Thirteen births! Slightly more than half lived!

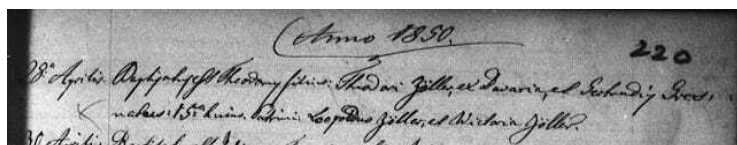
Ever since Ancestry came out, I've known from censuses that Gertrude and Theodore had 6 daughters and 2 sons, one son dying before age 10. The 4-year gap between Alexandra and Anna indicated a dead baby too. 7 living children out of 9 is a pretty good outcome.

Theodore Zeller	36	m	Upolsterer	\$20,000	1500	Bavaria
Gertrude	35	f				"
Amalia	12	f				N. York
Josephine	11	f				"
Alexandria	7	f				"
Anna	3	f				"
Arabella	1	f				"
Mary German	18	f	Servant			Denmark

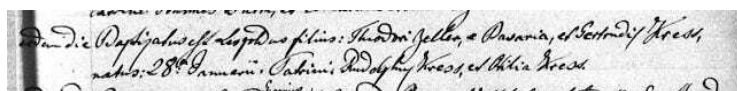
1860 Census: Theodore Zeller, age 36, sex m, occupation Upolsterer, value of real estate owned \$20,000, value of personal estate owned \$1500, birthplace Bavaria; Gertrude Zeller, age 35, sex f, birthplace Bavaria; Amalia Zeller, age 12, sex f, birthplace N. York; Josephine Zeller, age 11, sex f, birthplace N. York; Alexandria Zeller, age 7, sex f, birthplace N. York; Anna Zeller, age 3, sex f, birthplace N. York; Arabella Zeller, age 1, sex f, birthplace N. York; Mary German, age 18, sex f, occupation Servant, birthplace Denmark

Then the Roman Catholic dioceses of several cities released their baptism records. I found two more sons and a daughter! There were two children born and died in the four-year gap between Alexandra and Anna, and another baby born just months after they arrived in New York. Did Gertrude think that God was punishing her for conceiving Leopold Otto before

she was married? Or did she attribute the death to the stress of the voyage and setting up housekeeping in a foreign land? Either way, he must have been expected to die, because he was baptized aged 2 days.



Baptism record of son Theodore, who disappeared before the 1860 census: Anno 1850 28 Aprilis Baptism of Theodorus filius Theodori Zöller, ex Bavaria, et Gertrudis Gress nates 15 huins, Patrini: Leopoldus Zöller, et Victoria Zöller. [Baptism of Theodore the son of Theodore Zöller, from Bavaria, and Gertrude Gress. Born the 15th of this month. Godparents: Leopold Zöller, and Victoria Zöller. (Theodore's siblings)]



Baptism record of another son who died: idem die Baptisatus Leopoldus filius: Theodori Zeller, e Bavaria, et Gertrudis Kress. [He was baptized Leopold the son of Theodore Zeller, from Bavaria, and Gertrude Kress.] natus: 28 Januarii. Patriani Rudolphus Kress, et Otilia Kress. [born: 28th of January. Godparents Rudolph Kress, and Otilia Kress (Gertrude's siblings)]

Now, 7 living children out of 11 is not looking good. It is looking like the price of leaving rural Germany for life living in an American city. (However, I found out the child death rate in Germany was even higher).

Yesterday I found a new set of records on Ancestry, births marriages and deaths from the various localities of New York City. They are handwritten and sort-of mixed up - some in chronological order, some by village or town, some alphabetical.

When I say chronological, that's by the date the event was registered, not the date the event took place. Yet the date of the event is what is written - so I am looking at a list like this - April 6, 20, 15, March 23, April 30 — it's sort-of chronological.

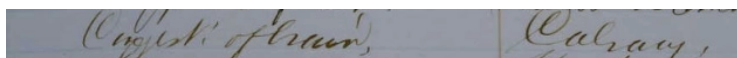
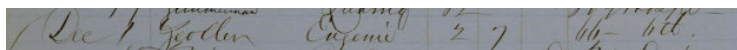
It's the same with alphabetical. The registry books have a page for each letter. On that page, everyone whose last name begins with, say, E, is on that page in the order the event was registered - so the list looks like Evans, Egbert, Engelheim, Easter. To make matters worse, the clerks ran out of room on pages with popular surnames like S (think Smith, Sullivan, Schmidt), so they added them to the blank pages at the end, or middle, or wherever they found a blank page. Thankfully my name begins with Z, last page!

It's the same way with the locality. At some point the Village of College Point became listed in a separate section, not included in the Town of Flushing. So what I really had to do was look at just about every page.

However, it's worth it! This manner of record-keeping is just what you would expect from original records before they were neaten up by some bureaucrat. That's perfect, because no mistakes were made in the copying!

Under Manhattan, Deaths, Z, I was appalled to find 3 more

children, and only one matched a child I already knew about. Now it's 7 living children out of 13.



Dec 1, Zeoller, Eugenie, age 2 years 7 months, address 66 6th Street, cause of death Congesti of brain, burial Calvary Cemetery

I can't even imagine being pregnant 13 times, and giving birth, and breast-feeding, and care-taking, and nursing, and burying, only to do it again the next year, for 20 years. (I am starting to cry now.) I don't know how Gertrude lived thru it. Between grief and exhaustion, I don't know how she could lug pails of water up and down the stairs to do the washing, or stand over a hot stove. I guess that's what the maid was for. Or oldest daughters Amelia and Josephine did it. Maybe that's why she died at 61. (Hey! That's my age!)

While Theodore ran a business and built furniture, Gertrude buried babies. In the three years that he ran for office and built schools, she birthed two babies and buried one. When he paid taxes on a watch and piano, she had just buried a baby and bore another. The contrast is stark.

Here is a chart of Gertrude and Theodore's children and their ages at baptism and death. The baptism age tells us that they lived at least that long.

ANCESTRAL WOMEN

Number	Name	Age at Baptism	Age at Death
1	Leopold	2 days	Before age 3
2	Amelia	No record	Adult
3	Josephine	6 weeks	Adult
4	Theodore	13 days	Before age 4
5	Alexandra	4 weeks	Adult
6	Leopold	8 weeks	Before age 3
7	Eugenie	4 weeks	2 years 7 months
8	Anna	7 weeks	Adult
9	Bella	8 weeks	Adult
10	Ferdinand	No record	11 days or 1 month
11	Kate	5 weeks	Adult
12	Alexander	No record	10 days
13	Alex	5 months	Adult

In the late 1800s, 20% of American children died before age 5. Of those, $\frac{2}{3}$ happened in the first year of life.

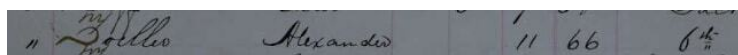
It was hard to keep children alive because the causes of death were so varied and probably found in combination. The diseases we can name and vaccinate against, like measles and scarlet fever, only killed a quarter of children. A third died from some kind of gastro-intestinal bug ingested from contaminated food, leading to diarrhea, often written on death certificates, and dehydration, which in the end caused convulsions, another word common on death certificates.

When my 2-year-old caught a bug on her first day of daycare, the vomiting started at 4 am and she was unresponsive by noon.

But at the hospital, IV fluids solved the dehydration and she was fine in an hour. I can see the speed at which babies must have died and the fear that must have engendered in the family.

Another third died of respiratory illnesses. A small number died of birth defects or accidents. Birth defects would consist of anything that would prevent a baby from gaining weight in the first month or so.

Gertrude had 2 babies die of phlebitis. A knowledgeable Substacker posits that is infection of the umbilical cord because it would take a baby 10 days to die of infection. One baby died at 10 days old, and the other age is either 11 days or 11 months. Infection of the umbilical cord was more common in males, and is caused by poor care of the cord and germs in the household. The 2-year-old died of congestion of the brain, and I cannot find that on the list of 1800s medical terms.



Zoeller, Alexander, age 11 days, address 66 6th Street, cause of death Phlebitis, burial Calvary

The biggest determiners of infant fatality were the separation of baby from mother and the father's earnings. 97% of babies with dead mothers died themselves. Mothers who worked outside

the home also had babies likely to die. (This probably led to the 1950s prejudice against mothers who worked).

The reason for this is breast-feeding. If the father's income was very low (or zero because there was no father), the mother had to work. Mothers who worked at home or did not hold jobs were able to breast-feed. German mothers did not breast-feed very long and supplemented with food early. The results can be easily seen. In cities, German immigrants had child mortality that was 30% higher than native-born women whose mothers were also native-born. Other immigrants also lost more babies than native-born women, but the contrast was not as startling. Also, Germany had the highest child mortality in Europe.

Breast-feeding was life-saving because antibodies from the mother's immune system and probiotics good for digestion are transferred to the baby in the process. Even more important, breast milk is pure. The biggest problem causing disease was food processing and preparation, both of which could claim the phrase "dirty rotten." Now I understand why the Food and Drug Act of 1906 was so important. Cities had a great variety of food, much of it contaminated by *E. coli* and other bacteria. Milk was the biggest culprit. Cows carried tuberculosis. There was no pasteurization. Who consumes the most milk? Children, especially babies. Summer, when food could not be kept cold, was known to be the time of baby death.

The father's salary made a big difference too, although it didn't matter if he was rich or poor, just whether he was poor or destitute. Fathers' money going towards food helped little. Americans largely ate enough calories per day. However, little was known about nutrition, and vitamins had yet to be discovered. The food and water consumed by the rich was just as contaminated as that by the poor. Even President Lincoln's

son died of typhus in the White House.

Theodore earned enough money to afford a live-in maid. But this luxury did not shield Gertrude from the infant mortality rate we find appalling today.

It didn't matter if the father was middle-class or rich, or what his occupation was, because being able to afford a doctor meant nothing. Before 1860, germs were unheard-of, and still not understood until after 1900. Germ theory was not taught in medical school; even the children of doctors and teachers died at the same rate as other professions' children. A doctor could not cure any disease. The first disease to have a cure was diphtheria, and that was not until 1900. Doctors had no better death rates than midwives. In fact, doctors messing around with their dirty hands actually spread disease from one sickbed to the next. Hospitals were death-houses to be avoided at all costs.

So if rich vs poor didn't matter, why was the father's income vital? Fathers' earnings had 2 important results - the mother did not have to leave her baby to work outside the home, and the home was larger. The size of the home mattered a great deal. If the ratio of people to rooms was cut from greater than 2 down to 1 or 2, infant mortality was cut in half. If the ratio was cut again to less than 1 person per room, infant mortality halved again. And where did big families live in few rooms? In cities.



A street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, where the Zoellers lived.

Choosing to live in a city carried a steep death penalty. The largest cities in the US had a 30% higher mortality rate than “cities” under 5000 people and rural areas. Rich native-born breast-fed babies, whose mothers had servants and were literate still died if they lived in cities. They died faster than poor immigrant babies with illiterate mothers who spoke no English and didn’t breast-feed, but lived on a farm.

Because population density was the biggest factor by far. The denser the place, the more efficient person-to-person contagion is. We re-learned this during COVID, with our 6-foot social distancing and fresh-air activities. Also, common resources like food and water supply are more efficiently contaminated when

they are close to each other for delivery to masses of people.



A typical room in a tenement, at the Tenement Museum, New York City

So the most important aspect of a father's income was the home it provided. An apartment with 2 bedrooms, a kitchen and a living room was a healthy place to live for 4 people. If 5 to 8 people lived there, the infant mortality rate doubled. More than 8 people, the death rate doubled again.

In 1850, Gertrude had herself, her husband, 3 babies, her sister-in-law, and 4 boarders in her home. She had lost one baby already, and would lose one of those 3 children. In such an apartment, did Gertrude, Theodore, the 3 babies, and his

sister share the bedrooms, while the 4 male boarders rolled up mattresses in the living room?

352	Theodore Seller	25 m	Cabinet Maker	do
	Gertrude Seller	25 f		do
	Amelia Seller	3 f		N York
	Barbara J. Seller	1 1/2 f		do
	Theodore Seller	3 m		do
	Victoria Seller	17 f		Germany
	Henry Schroder	24 m	Cabinet Maker	do
	Casper Kartch	26 m	Varnisher	Germany
	John Schwab	24 m	Upholsterer	do
	Karl Swartz	23 m	Cabinet Maker	do

1850 Census Family Number Name Age Sex Occupation Birthplace
 352 Theodore Seller 25 m Cabinet Maker do (ditto) Gertrude Seller
 25 f do Amelia Seller 3 f N. York Barbara J. Seller 1 1/2 f do Theodore
 Seller 3/12 m do Victoria Seller 17 f Germany Henry Schroder 24
 m Cabinet Maker do Casper Kartch 26 m Varnisher Germany John
 Schwab 24 m Upholster do Karl Swartz 23 m Cabinet Maker do

Who lived at home? If home meant female family members who could help with child care, like Theodore's sister, there was no difference in the death rate. If home meant boarders, it was a lot worse. By 1860, Gertrude had gotten rid of the boarders, but had 5 daughters and a maid. By that time she had lost 2 more babies. If Theodore had gotten her the maid to help keep the children alive, it wasn't working. Statistically, if home meant servants, there was only a slight difference.

Gertrude and Theodore lived at 66 6th Street at the corner of First Avenue, in Kleindeutschland, the German section of Manhattan. Everyone lived in tenements, apartment buildings 3 to 6 stories high with 4 apartments per floor. Each apartment was between 300 and 400 square feet and had between 2

and 4 rooms. Not bedrooms, rooms. Only one room had a window, and this was before electric light. The outhouse and the water pump for all 16 or 20 families were in the yard. Conditions were actually better in the 1850s and 1860s because the buildings were newer and the landlords had not gotten around to cramming more buildings on the 25 x 100 lots.



I can feel this because my daughter lives in a 400-sq-foot walk-up in Manhattan with 2 windows overlooking the yard, where the trash and recycling bins are. No sunlight reaches inside. It is long and narrow; when we sit on the couch, we can almost touch the TV. Crawling across the bed is easier than walking

around it. Looking out the window gives a view of another building with brick walls and fire escapes; I could play catch with the person opposite me. The kitchen has mini-appliances and no counter. When I visit, we have to walk around each other. Walking up four flights of stairs worn from decades of thousands of feet, or throwing trash in the bin, looking straight up at a small square of sky, enclosed on 4 sides by brick and fire escapes, it is easy to imagine it is 1900. It is easy to imagine the 3 consecutive rooms: her kitchen and bathroom the kitchen, then living room, then bedroom on the far end.

Except that my daughter is one person. Tenement homes held families of 10.

When they were about 43, Gertrude and Theodore closed their furniture business and moved their family from Manhattan's 17th Ward to a Long Island village. Their last child and only surviving son, Alex, was two years old. College Point, with its parks, wide streets, and big houses, was healthier. Gertrude took in boarders again, but this time she had a house, not a tenement, and it was big enough to be called a hotel.



College Point Hotel in 1922, 35 years after Gertrude's death,
still called the Zoeller Residence

I don't know what power Gertrude drew on to survive her many losses, but she did not let them make her bitter. She nurtured not only her own children, but people she took into her home. Four of her granddaughters were named for her.

The following made no difference in the child mortality rate:

- wealth of family
- access to medical care
- amount of food available
- age of mother
- number of previous children
- education level of parents
- ability to speak English

- citizenship status

These things would make a difference today. But the fact that none of these made a difference in the past shows that the key difference between our bundles of joy and our foremothers' tragedies is that we know germs cause disease. Their babies just died, and they didn't know why.

Statistics:

all statistics taken from *Fatal Years*

- 1850-1865, 7 upstate New York counties, probability of dying before age 5, urban 22.9%, rural 19.2%
- 1890, several US states, dying between ages 1-4, urban/rural ratio 2.07; dying before age 1, urban/rural ratio 1.63
- 1900, 88% of childhood deaths (under age 15) happened between ages 0-4; 59% of childhood deaths happened between ages 0-1
- 1926, Baltimore, fathers earning less than \$450 per year had 16% child mortality rate; fathers earning more than \$1850 per year had 3.7% child mortality rate
- 1900, US, of all professions, laborers' children had highest mortality rate. Skilled craftsmen, which Theodore was, still had a bad child mortality rate.
- 1900, US, the nativity of the father had no impact on the child mortality rate.
- 1900, US, immigrant mothers had a higher child mortality rate. However, the vast majority of immigrants lived in cities. Immigrant mothers living in rural areas had the same child mortality rate as native-born rural women.
- 1900, US, native mothers whose own mothers were immigrants had the same child mortality rate as native mothers

whose own mothers were also native-born.

- If the home had 2 or more people per room, the child mortality rate was 25% higher than if the home had 1 person or fewer per room. However, fathers who earned more money could provide larger homes. Among fathers who earned the same income, homes with 2 or more people per room still had a 2% higher child mortality rate than homes with 1 person or fewer per room.
- The make-up of the family did not have an impact on child mortality, except for one type of person.
- Families with adult females besides the mother had the same child mortality as those where the mother was the only woman in the home.
- Families with servants only had lower child mortality if the mother was an immigrant living in an urban area, and then the improvement was slight.
- However, families that took in boarders had a 15% higher child mortality rate than families which did not.
- The following ethnic groups had high child mortality rates: African-Americans, Irish immigrants, French-Canadian immigrants, and German immigrants. This is because African-Americans had far lower income than other groups; Irish immigrants came to America after famine in poor health with few skills, and therefore had low incomes and lived in cities; and French-Canadian and German immigrant mothers breast-fed their babies for very short times.
- Jewish immigrant mothers had low mortality rates. This is because Jewish mothers breast-fed their babies for very long times.
- The Rocky Mountain region had very high child mortality

rates.

- New England had the highest child mortality rates; the South had the lowest. This is due to New England being largely urban and the South being largely rural.
- Between 1880 and 1900, child mortality rates in the largest cities (New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia) dropped more quickly than in other areas because those cities installed water and sewer systems.

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She Lost Two Children, Then Crossed an Ocean to Build a New Life

by Kirsten M. Max-Douglas

Our Growing Family Tree

<https://ourgrowingfamilytree.substack.com>

Anastasia Hlinka – my maternal great-great grandmother.

This is a story about what it takes to build a new life — not the triumphant kind, not the fresh-start kind, but the kind that begins in a Carpathian village where you have already buried two of your children and have no choice but to keep going anyway.

Maria Hurkala was born on the third of January, 1885. She died on the twentieth. She was seventeen days old.

ANCESTRAL WOMEN

MATRICULA										BAPTISATORUM.									
No. page	Anno, Mense, Dies		Baptisati							Loco Originis & Domus natus	Pontificatus mense, regimine, & indicis & Regis		Pontificatus mense, regimine & indicis & Regis		Observationes				
	Natus	Matris	Natus	Matris	Natus	Matris	Natus	Matris	Natus		Matris	Natus	Matris	Natus	Matris	Natus	Matris	Natus	Matris
1	1885	7/1885	Maria	1	1														
2	1885	8-2	Bartholomaeus	1	1														
3	1885	13-2	Helena	1	1														
4	1885	18-2	Maria	1	1														
5	1885	23-2	Bartholomaeus	1	1														
6	1885	23-2	Bartholomaeus	1	1														
7	1885	23-2	Bartholomaeus	1	1														
8	1885	23-2	Bartholomaeus	1	1														
9	1885	23-2	Bartholomaeus	1	1														
10	1885	23-2	Bartholomaeus	1	1														
11	1885	23-2	Bartholomaeus	1	1														

Birth, baptism, and death record for Maria Hurkala (1885-1885) –
Line 1

Her mother, Anastasia, was twenty-four. It was winter in Litmanova, a small Greek Catholic village tucked into the Carpathian foothills of what was then the Kingdom of Hungary, now northeastern Slovakia. The church register recorded the burial. The village moved on. So did Anastasia.

This is her story. Not the dramatic parts, though there are those, too. The steady parts. The daily parts. The part where you get up the next morning and do it again.

A Village, and What Was Left There

Litmanova in the 1880s was a world unto itself. Greek Catholic families like the Hurkalas had farmed and worshipped and buried their dead in this same valley for generations. The church was the center of everything: baptisms, marriages, deaths, all recorded in its registers. It is because of those registers that we know Maria at all.

Anastasia Hlinka and Constantinus Hurkala had six children. Two of them are buried in Litmanova.

Maria came first and barely stayed, seventeen days in January 1885. Then, one by one, the children who lived: Maria (Mary) in 1886, Anna in 1888, Katharine in 1890. Three daughters in four years, all healthy, all growing.

And then Petrus, born 2 February 1893. He lived long enough to be known, long enough to walk, perhaps, to say a word or two in that particular way small children do, before he died on 5 August 1894, seventeen months old.

ANCESTRAL WOMEN

MATRICULA						BAPTISATORUM					
No. matric. matric.	Anno West. Die		Baptismi				Anno Matr.	Matr. Matr.	Matr. Matr.	Matr. Matr.	Observationes
	Natus	Obitus	Natus	Obitus	Natus	Obitus					
1	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	
2	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	
3	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	
4	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	
5	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	
6	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	
7	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	
8	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	
9	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	
10	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	
11	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	1893	1898	

Birth, baptism, and death record for Petras Hurkala (1893-1894) –
Line 7

Two children buried. Four children living. The years between those losses were ordinary years, which is another way of saying they were full: of bread and laundry and the particular exhaustion of raising three small girls in a mountain village while pregnant, or nursing, or both. Anastasia's endurance didn't look like anything remarkable from the outside. It looked like showing up.

The Interval

In June 1900, Constantinus left for Pennsylvania.

This was not unusual. In the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries, men from Litmanova and the surrounding villages crossed the Atlantic by the thousands, drawn by the coal and steel industries of western Pennsylvania. Many intended to work for a few years and return. Some sent for their families instead.

Constantinus arrived in June 1900. The records place him in Pennsylvania; they do not yet tell us exactly when Anastasia packed up the household and followed. What we know is this: their youngest child, Michael, was born in Pennsylvania, which means Anastasia made the crossing, with three children, sometime between 1900 and approximately 1902.

Sit with that for a moment. She had already buried a seventeen-day-old infant and a seventeen-month-old son in the soil of that village. She had raised three daughters to girlhood there. And now she closed the house, gathered the children, and left.

The ocean crossing in steerage would not have been a romantic journey. For most immigrants of that era, the passage was grueling: weeks below deck, crowded conditions, unfamiliar food, and the uncertainty of what waited on the other side. She arrived, as so many did, into a country whose language she did not speak. And she kept going.

Star Junction, Fayette County

The family settled in Star Junction, a coal company town in Fayette County, Pennsylvania. It was the kind of place that had sprung up fast around the mines: rows of company houses, a company store, men who went underground in the dark and came up in the dark. Many of the families around them would have been familiar: other Litmanova families, other Slovak

Greek Catholics who had made the same crossing.

Michael was born here. Pennsylvania-born, the last of her children, the one who came into the world after the ocean, after the loss of a country, after whatever it costs a woman to start over.

Anastasia ran her household in Star Junction for the better part of two decades. What did endurance look like in daily life there? It looked like coal dust on everything. It looked like cooking for a family on a miner's wages. It looked like speaking Slovak at home and watching your children learn English faster than you. It looked like the ordinary Tuesday, the one that doesn't make it into any record, the one where nothing notable happened except that you were still there.

What Remained

Anastasia Hlinka died on 18 January 1917. She was fifty-six years old. The mines were still running. The war was still on in Europe, the same part of Europe she had left fifteen years before.

She did not live to see her son Michael grow up. He died in 1934, at about thirty-one, the Pennsylvania-born child, the one who came after. She did not live to see that loss.

What she did leave: three daughters who lived into extraordinary old age. Mary died in 1972 at eighty-six. Anna, my great-grandmother, died in 1975 at eighty-seven. Katharine died in 1977 at eighty-six. Anna and Katharine would eventually make their way to New York City, carrying the family forward into a new borough, a new generation, a new century. Between the three of them, they spanned nearly a century of American life, rooted in a village in the Carpathians and transplanted far from

SHE LOST TWO CHILDREN, THEN CROSSED AN OCEAN TO BUILD A NEW...

the coal fields where it all began.



Photograph of Anna Hurkala and Kirsten M. Max-Douglas, 1970

ANCESTRAL WOMEN



Katharine Hurkala and Kirsten M. Max-Douglas, 1970.

I cannot know what Anastasia felt when she buried Maria in January 1885, or Petrus in August 1894. I cannot know what she thought on the ship, or on the morning she first saw Star Junction. The records don't give us that.

But they give us this: she was there. She kept arriving. Whatever she carried across that ocean, her daughters carried forward. Strong women, generation after generation. And here I am, because she kept going.

Anastasia Hlinka / b. 15 April 1860, Litmanova, Slovakia / d. 18 January 1917, Star Junction, Fayette County, Pennsylvania
Maternal/Maternal line

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Josephine Sullivan, the Janitress of West 30th Street

by Lauren Maguire

The Heirloom Detective: Lulu Mackenzie of the Archives

<https://lulumackenzieofthearchives.substack.com>

Widowed and pregnant at 23, my great-grandmother Josephine survived on brutal janitress work—shoveling coal and hauling ash—to keep her daughters housed and fed. In January 1920, the “Great White Plague” of tuberculosis claimed her husband, William, in their West 25th Street tenement. By spring, Josephine was a widow with a thirteen-month-old and a newborn child, Mary, delivered just seventy days after his funeral. She would spend the next 21 years of her life rising up after that loss, ensuring her daughters received an education, reached adulthood, and married and had families of their own.

If you draw a square on a map of Manhattan, up from 16th Street to 30th, from the Hudson River east toward Ninth Avenue, you capture the roughly one square mile in which

my great-grandmother lived the entirety of her life.

Josephine Sullivan was born on January 18, 1897, at 449 West 16th Street.

She died on May 1, 1941, at 420 West 29th Street.

Today, it takes under an hour to walk the loop of sixteen blocks north to south and a handful of avenues across. She never left Chelsea.

What remains of her life exists in fragments: census lines, a voter register, certificates in the city's Municipal Archives, and a color photocopy of a wedding portrait so faint it feels more like memory than evidence of her existence.

The tenements she lived in—and loved in, and labored in—were all demolished decades ago. Their municipal I-cards—Improvement Cards that once recorded plumbing lines and stairwell alterations—are missing or incomplete. The floors she scrubbed, the banisters she gripped, the stairs she swept, and the stoops where she sat, gossiped, and shared fellowship with her family, friends, and neighbors are all gone, vanished beneath the modern West Side, ghosts among the glass and cobblestone streets of what is now home to a trendy neighborhood sporting upscale stores and luxury high rises.

New York City reinvented itself atop the graveyard of her labor, “slum clearances” making way for modern housing projects like the Elliott and Fulton Houses.

What remains of her existence is not a building, but a pattern: the life she held together inside one square mile, and the inheritance that survived it.

1897–1918

Josephine's early life was an exercise in proximity. Born in **1897** at **449 West 16th Street**, she was the eleventh child of Irish immigrants who had already buried six of their own. In the 1900 census, her mother, Mary Driscoll Sullivan, is recorded as having given birth to twelve children, only six living—fifty percent mortality. Death would have been feared, yes. But familiar.

As a child, she played in the shadow of “Old Law” tenements—dumbbell buildings shaped around narrow airshafts meant to circulate air but which often carried disease instead. As an infant, she lived in a “front” or “rear” tenement—a distinction that determined whether she saw the gray light of Chelsea or the dark interior of the block.

That life is the preserved world of 1911 Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, as well as in the Tenement Museum's blueprints of 97 Orchard Street: three-room flats, shared hall sinks where water ran brown more often than clear, the daily negotiation of light and privacy, and breath.

Right next door at **451 West 16th Street** lived the **Hendricksons**. In that kind of building, “next door” meant shared airshafts—rough brick wells barely wide enough to pass light, yet big enough to carry the smell of cooking steam and the sounds of lullabies, laughter, and arguments. Laundry lines crossed overhead like flags of surrender.

Survival in Chelsea was not sentimental: rent was due whether a fever broke or not; infants were often buried before baptism, little processions disappearing into Calvary and local parish plots; infection and industrial air were as ordinary as street noise.

There was no safety net, save the one families and friends constructed for each other.

To the west lay the Hudson River, blowing salt and coal smoke. Freight trains ran along Tenth Avenue—known as “**Death Avenue**”—so dangerous that riders on horseback carried red flags ahead of them.



Josephine came of age as the city transformed: the first subway rattled through in 1904. In 1911, when Josephine was thirteen, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire was a grim reminder that for working-class girls, their labor was as disposable as they were. Skyscrapers were beginning to pierce Midtown, but Josephine would not see them from her window; New York rose up around her while she remained firmly on the ground.

William J. Hendrickson, three years older, grew up in that

same small grid. He was born in **1894 at 64 Gansevoort Street**, in the produce district. His father, Hamilton, worked as a **vegetable agent and later as a cart peddler**, navigating the chaos of the **Gansevoort Street Market**, stepping over crates, dodging shouting dockworkers, and avoiding the hooves of horses stamping in the river's damp.

Josephine and William did not go far to meet; they shared a wall.

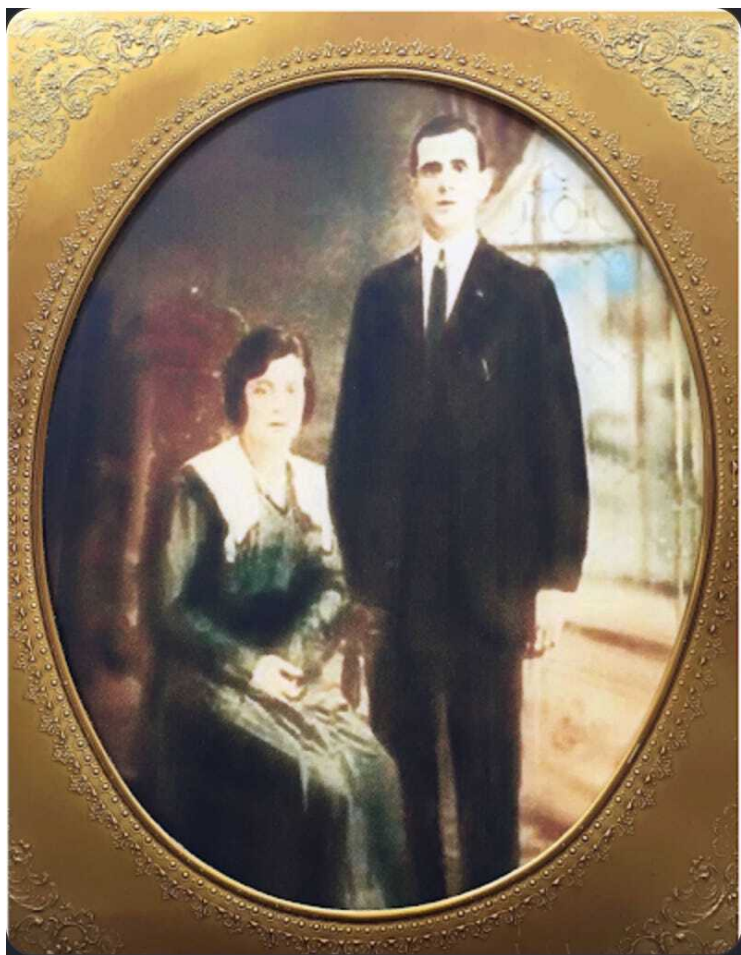
Their mothers, Mary Driscoll Sullivan and Annie Byrne Hendrickson, would have been neighbors and friends, gossiping, sharing food, holding babies, and grieving losses together.

The two women shared a community, and eventually, grandchildren.

1918–1920

On **February 17, 1918**, Josephine married the boy next door, and they set up their home at **433 West 25th Street**.

Reverend Dougherty married her and William at the Guardian Angel church—known as the Shrine Church of the Sea—which served the longshoremen, sailors, and merchant marines who worked the Chelsea Piers. I picture them on that Sunday after Valentine's Day, surrounded by family and friends on the one day of the week everyone could gather; the church smelled of incense and the salt and brine of the Hudson River. The church was decorated with nautical motifs—anchors, ship lanterns, and votive candles for men at sea, the Guardian Angel standing as spiritual protection for the men in both their families who did dangerous work on the docks.



Josephine and William on their wedding day in 1918. Most records reduce her to census lines and certificates, but this portrait offers a rare glimpse of the woman behind them. She is carefully dressed in her Sunday best—a dark wool day dress with a wide white Peter Pan collar, a style that echoed Victorian fashion but remained proper in

conservative Irish Catholic parishes. The crisp collar and tailored bodice suggest attention to detail—and a quiet sense of style.

Just weeks before her wedding, Josephine's father, Michael Sullivan, died on January 12, 1918. He had labored as a coal shoveler feeding the furnaces that powered Manhattan Gas Works. Coal dust blackened his hands for decades. That dust would return to Josephine's life, dirtying her skirts in ways she could not yet know.

On **November 29, 1918**, at the **height of the Spanish Influenza pandemic**, Josephine gave birth to **their first child, Margaret—my grandmother.**

But not at their home on West 25th Street.

Margaret's **birth certificate lists 410 West 14th Street**, a commercial produce building owned and operated by the **George F. Fish Company**, a celery wholesaler whose crates of greens and root vegetables were stacked along the loading bays every morning.

Since research shows none of their kin lived at that address, I must infer motive from geography.

Certificate of Baptism

Saint Bernard's Church
328 West 14th Street New York 14, New York

This is to Certify

That MARGARET THERESA HENDRICKSON
Child of WILLIAM HENDRICKSON
and JOSEPHINE GUILIKIAN
Born in 410 W. 14 New York City
on the 29th day of November 1918, was

Baptized

on the 22nd day of December, 1918
according to the
Rite of the Roman Catholic Church
by the Rev. MATHEW A. DELANEY
the Sponsors being { CORNELIUS GUILIKIAN
ESTHER AKINS

as appears from the Baptismal Register of this Church

Dated August 14, 1954 Volume 1 Page 4 No. 52

Seal Rev. P. Horacio Rodriguez Pastor
Sho Pak married

Tenement airshafts were notorious incubators of infection, but commercial produce lofts were different—they offered high ceilings, open loading doors, and air that moved.

Josephine's father-in-law, Hamilton, the produce agent who navigated New York's wholesale vegetable trade, would have known the building at 410 West 14th Street well, its earthy scent of crated celery for the George F. Fish Company, the scrape and rhythm of that district, and most importantly, that clean air mattered.

The address also likely had a direct tie to Josephine's husband: William's recorded work in the **1920 Census as a "helper" to a cabinet maker** in Chelsea means he likely worked for a **piano company**. Notably, **the Ward Piano Company leased the upper lofts of that very same building**.

I cannot know whether Josephine appealed to William or Hamilton, or whether they took the initiative themselves to relocate her to a safer place for childbirth during the Spanish Flu.

But the choice stands as evidence of a family using the only resources they had—wits, proximity, connections—to outmaneuver a city-wide danger and to bring a pregnant Josephine into the river-breezed loft.

I picture Josephine laboring not in her own narrow tenement bed on 25th Street but on a straw mattress on a warehouse floor, among apple crates and celery boxes, the frosty November wind blowing through the loft, salt from the Hudson cutting the chill.

Cold, perhaps. But clean.

And there was food.

Fresh produce wasn't ornamental; it fortified bodies—especially a nursing mother recovering from childbirth—that

might otherwise have failed. Cabbage for Vitamin C, potatoes for calories, apples stored through winter, and citrus arriving by rail. Margaret's birth was an early rehearsal for survival.

Just a few weeks later, on a cold December day just before Christmas, the family stood in St. Bernard's Church on 14th Street as the baby was baptized. Josephine's brother, Cornelius Sullivan, stood as Margaret's godfather—his pledge of protection called upon sooner than anyone imagined.

Josephine's network and her neighborhood were the scaffolding of her survival.

To rise after loss, she would need it.

1920–1925

If the 1918 flu was a lightning strike, tuberculosis was a slow ebb.

In the wake of influenza, tuberculosis mortality rose in many places; compromised lungs were more vulnerable. William's employment records offer a clue: "film maker" on his 1917 WWI draft card; "helper, cabinet factory" on the 1920 census.

In those days, being a "filmmaker" was not glamorous. It meant working in dark rooms using harsh chemical processors like silver nitrate, which would have stained both his hands and his lungs; cabinet work, which in their neighborhood would have been at a piano factory, meant inhaling fine dust, shellac, and turpentine from sanding—all irritants that made breathing harder even before illness arrived.

None of this "caused" tuberculosis. But it helps explain the physical environment in which his lungs failed.

They had been married less than two years when the "White Plague" began its work. William's death certificate shows that

he was treated for seven months. By summer 1919, he would have been coughing; by fall, he would have been thinner and flushed, his fever rising and falling; his wasting away just slow enough for Josephine to hold out hope.

ANCESTRAL WOMEN

58-9898-18 B, 16 B

1 PLACE OF DEATH
Borough of Manhattan

STATE OF NEW YORK
Department of Health of The City of New York
BUREAU OF RECORDS
STANDARD CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

No. 433w 25th St.

Character of premises, whether apartment, private, hotel, hospital or other place, etc. Permanent

Registered No. 2342

2 FULL NAME William Hendrickson

3 SEX Male 4 COLOR OR RACE W 5 SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED, OR DIVORCED (Write the word) Married 10 DATE OF DEATH Jan 21st (Month) (Day) (Year) 1920

6 DATE OF BIRTH June 22nd (Month) (Day) (Year) 1896

7 AGE 25 yrs. 6 mos. 29 ds. If LESS than 1 day, hrs. or min.

8 OCCUPATION (a) Trade, profession, or particular kind of work Laborer (b) General nature of industry, business or establishment in which employed (or employer)

9 BIRTHPLACE (State or country) U.S.

(a) How long in U. S. (b) How long resident in City of New York Life

10 NAME OF FATHER Samuel Hendrickson

11 BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or country) U.S.

12 MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER Johnnie Reames

13 BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or country) Ireland

14 Special INFORMATION required in deaths in hospitals and institutions and in deaths of non-residents and recent residents.

Former or usual Residence

15 I hereby certify that the foregoing particulars (Nos. 1 to 14 inclusive) are correct as near as the same can be ascertained, and I further certify that I attended the deceased from June 19th 1919 to Jan 21st 1920 that I last saw him alive on the 20th day of Jan 1920, that death occurred on the date stated above at 2:30 A.M., and that the cause of death was as follows:
Pulmonary Tuberculosis

Contributory (Secondary)

duration 2 yrs. 1 mos. 29 ds.

Witness my hand this 21st day of Jan 1920

Signature W. A. Hendrickson M. D.

Address 348 W 22

FILED JAN 22 1920

17 PLACE OF BURIAL Catharine

18 UNDERTAKER Jan F. McConnick ADDRESS 225-10 Ave

DATE OF BURIAL Jan 24th 1920

William Hendrickson's death certificate, listing his cause of death as Pulmonary Tuberculosis.

The intimacy of those final months would have smelled like

carbolic acid and eucalyptus, with the sound of a twenty-five-year-old man's lungs failing, as Josephine felt the weight of a second child growing inside her, grief already seeping into the walls.

On January 6, 1920, the federal census taker knocked on their door. The schedule lists a family intact—William, Josephine, and little Margaret.

[illegible]

It does not say that William was dying.

He died on January 21, 1920—three days after Josephine's 23rd birthday. William was 25.

Their daughter, Margaret, was 13 months old, and Josephine was six months pregnant.

Tuberculosis was a reportable disease by this period, so it's possible that a nurse or Department of Health worker visited

and made notes about the home, likely indicating there would soon be a widow who would need help. If these records exist, I haven't found them yet.

What is certain is simpler. There was no time for grief. The city kept moving; so did Josephine.

On April 10, 1920, Josephine gave birth again—to Mary—seventy days after William's death.

Fatherless from the start.

For the next few years, Josephine anchored herself to the first-floor apartment on West 25th Street, where she and William had lived their married life. City directories and later records still list her there as “wid Will,” widow of William, householder, holding the ground she and William had made home.

Staying mattered.

Staying meant insulation: **not comfort, but protection, with her Sullivan and Hendrickson kin nearby.** After William's death, it was his father, **Hamilton, who brought Josephine a seasonal inventory of mercy—winter cabbage, onions, and potatoes**—sourced from the same wholesale docks where he worked in the pre-dawn hours. These were the “hard” goods that could survive in a basement pantry, providing the nutritional grit the girls needed.

Josephine's friends and extended family lived near her on blocks she'd walked all her life; her home on West 25th Street was also one block south of the **original Hudson Guild**, which ran milk stations designed to fortify against tuberculosis, hosted children's clubs, and provided quiet aid for widows who couldn't make the rent.

In the 1924 voter rolls, Josephine appears by name just a few years after she was legally eligible to vote—no longer just a line on a census but a woman signing herself into the city's

record as a voter. **She signed her own name as a citizen—a tactical move to ensure the Tammany Hall machine saw her as more than just a name in a census or a widow on the ground floor.**

NAME OF CITIZEN								INFORMATION AS TO CITIZEN													
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
909	W. 30th St.	William	Sullivan	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.
910	W. 30th St.	Josephine	Sullivan	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.
911	W. 30th St.	Frank D.	Waterman	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.
912	W. 30th St.	Charles W.	Sullivan	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.
913	W. 30th St.	Stephen	Sullivan	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.	1122 St.

1925 Voter Register, showing that Josephine voted in the 1925 New York City mayoral election, a landmark contest between Jimmy Walker (D), a charismatic State Senator known as a flamboyant “man-about-town,” and Frank D. Waterman (R), the president of a pen company who ran on a platform of reform against Tammany Hall corruption.

Josephine’s survival became an act of repetition: open the windows, haul the coal, wipe away the soot, keep the fire burning. In those repetitive motions of survival—up stairwells, down hallways, through winters—she began **the quiet ascent from widowhood into work.**

It was the beginning of her rise after loss.

1925–1930

By the mid-1920s, her mourning became maintenance as Josephine had taken on the labor that would define the rest of her life.

ANCESTRAL WOMEN

Records place her at **443 West 30th Street** by 1925, and by 1930, the census states the arrangement plainly: she worked as a janitress, and two letters on that record, “I.L.,” show **how she paid her rent: “In Lieu.”**

She stoked coal furnaces and hauled ash barrels to the curb in exchange for a roof over their heads.

[illegible]

Column 8 of the 1930 Census for Josephine shows the notation "I.L.," meaning 'in lieu of rent,' exchanging her labor for a roof over her daughters' heads.

The best surviving description I've found of what that work meant comes not from her building—its I-cards are missing—but from Tenement Museum records describing **Fanny Roga-**

rshevsky, another widow-janitress who lost her husband to tuberculosis.

Like Fanny, Josephine performed the dirty, exhausting work of cleaning shared toilets and hauling galvanized ash barrels to the curb. She rose before dawn to shake down ashes, hauled heavy ash cans up narrow stairs, scrubbed hallways and shared toilets with lye soap that cracked her hands. And she did it again the next day.

Josephine's life would have been hauntingly similar. Just as there had been coal dust on her father's cuffs, there would be soot on her own skirt. But each morning's emptied ash barrel was an act of perseverance, each stairwell climbed another rung toward survival.

1930–1941

In 1926, William's mother died, and by 1930, the remaining elders followed.

On May 1, 1930, Hamilton Hendrickson died. A few months later, in September, Josephine's mother, Mary Driscoll Sullivan, died too.

Within months, what had remained of the generation above her disappeared.

Grief shifted upward: **Josephine was no longer a daughter in a family; she was the family's spine.**

Outside her square mile, the Great Depression raged. Breadlines popped up along with Hoovervilles in shantytowns under the West Side piers, and desperation and violence sharpened near the docks and the yards.

But Josephine simply kept going.

Family legend holds that upon his death, Hamilton left

\$500 to each of Josephine's daughters. Later in her life, my grandmother Margaret recalled walking downtown with Josephine to the probate court every month, because the funds came in increments.

I haven't yet found the will or the probate records in time to publish this, but the memory is like a map. I picture them down on Chambers Street among the echoes of voices in those marble halls, their feet tracing worn steps, accepting salvation in the form of a clerk's inked stamp.

The generous gift explains how they stayed upright when so little was left. But that money did not replace the core reality: Josephine survived through her own labor.

She went down so her daughters could go up.

As janitress, she didn't just live in the building—she was its heartbeat. If a pipe burst at 3 a.m., if the furnace died in the basement in February, it was her hands that answered. Four- and five-story walk-ups meant no elevators; every bag of coal, every tenant's groceries, every ash can, every child carried up and down the central staircase. She would have climbed eighty to a hundred stairs per full floor—again and again, day after day.

Over the years, she must have walked thousands of miles, all within the same few city blocks.

The city did not preserve the Improvement Cards for the tenements that Josephine kept standing. And the buildings themselves are gone. Her blocks were cleared for mid-century redevelopment; housing projects like the Elliott and Fulton Houses rose where her world once stood. The city built its monument to "modern" housing on the graveyard of her labor, across a landscape that had already held so much loss.

On May 1, 1941—eleven years to the day after Hamilton

died—Josephine died. It is not lost on me that she died on **May Day**.

In the bruising rhythm of old Manhattan, **May 1st** was not a celebration of spring, but a day of collective upheaval known as **Moving Day**. Nearly all **residential leases in the city expired simultaneously at nine o'clock in the morning**, forcing an entire population of the working poor to uproot at once.

The result was a chaotic, city-wide choreography of the dispossessed, where the narrow cobblestones of Chelsea became choked with horse-drawn carts piled high with iron bedframes, chipped washbasins, and the literal weight of families trying to survive.

Moving Day was a frantic race to find a slightly better airshaft or a cheaper basement before the clock struck ten. To “move on” was rarely an ascent; it was a tactical retreat from a landlord’s demand or a building’s decay, a repeating cycle of hauling a life’s belongings through the soot of the West Side.

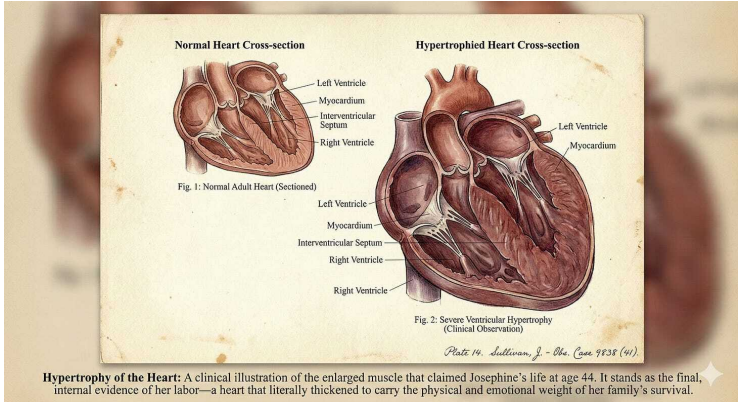
I find it a haunting symmetry that when Josephine finally “moved on” for the last time on May Day in 1941, she died at **5:45 AM**.

She passed within the very hour that had governed her life for decades—the cold, blue light of the pre-dawn when a janitress was bound by the city’s various Sanitary and the Housing Maintenance Codes, and later the Tenement House Act, which required that the iron pipes of the vertical grid were required to hum with heat and hot water by 6:00 AM; that meant Josephine would have had to rise long before the sun came up.

She died just fifteen minutes before the city’s official morning began, escaping the final whistle of the boilers and the relentless churn of the coal shovel. After twenty-one years of fueling the warmth of others, she left at the exact moment she spent so

many mornings beginning again.

Josephine's death certificate lists her cause of death as "hypertrophy of the heart," a clinical receipt for a life of burden, overexertion, and labor lived at the furnace.



An AI-generated illustration of the enlarged muscle that claimed Josephine's life. It stands as internal evidence of her labor—a heart that literally expanded and thickened to carry the physical and emotional burden of her family's survival.

She carried the literal weight of years of grief and labor until her heart's work was done.

Epilogue

From her small corner of the world, Josephine witnessed the birth of modern America: the subway, labor reform, Suffrage, Prohibition, the 1929 Wall Street crash, the Great Depression, the New Deal, and the world's march towards World War II.

And through all that change, she lived almost entirely within earshot of the Hudson's foghorns, the clatter of freight trains on Death Avenue, and the shouts of longshoremen beginning before dawn.

She didn't own a radio.

She didn't own a home.

She had little leisure and immense responsibility. But she lasted long enough to see both of her daughters grow into adulthood. Both girls married in 1937 and went on to have families of their own.

Josephine's daughter Margaret had five children, and her daughter Mary had three. Eight grandchildren in a line that had already buried so many. Josephine would hold at least three of them before she died in 1941.

Although he was born after she passed, one of those eight grandchildren was my father.

He hauled himself up and out of poverty through school, work, sheer grit and resolve; he did so while supporting his mother, his sisters, and a niece; he helped countless friends along the way and was helped in turn. He raised a family, became a lawyer, and is a man of integrity who has traveled so far beyond the square mile that shaped his grandmother's life, further than anything she could have imagined.

And yet, poverty has consequences that persist—physical, mental, emotional. The ones who escape it carry guilt, and the ones who remain carry the body's memory of strain, like Josephine's heart.

Her endurance was not glamorous.

Her "rise" did not guarantee an easy life for her descendants. But it kept the line unbroken.

Today, I am the same age Josephine was when she died. My

life would be unrecognizable to her.

I wish I could sit with her on a summer stoop evening in the old neighborhood, the hum of children playing and laughing in the background; she leans against me, resting finally, and I tell her how the city's erasure was not the end of her story.

The buildings are gone. The I-cards are missing.

But her DNA lives on in those of us who remain, **all because she rose.**

Research Note: The Unfinished Archive

I have more research to do. The archives of a city as vast as New York do not always yield their secrets on a schedule. I am currently reaching out to the Archdiocese of New York to locate parochial school records for Margaret and Mary at St. Columba, seeking their health and attendance notes as two girls who grew up in the wake of the Spanish Flu and the "White Plague." I am also tracing **Hudson Guild Settlement House** records at Columbia University, searching for "Milk Station" ledgers that may have recorded the Hendrickson name among the widows receiving aid.

The most striking discovery of this research, however, is the physical erasure of Josephine's world. I have confirmed through the **NYC Department of Buildings** and **NYCHA demolition records** that every address Josephine called home was razed between 1940 and 1960. These were not always "slum clearances" due to decay, but targeted redevelopments—like **Project NY5-4 (the Elliott Houses)**—where the city decided that the **"In Lieu" tenements of the working poor no longer fit the vision of a modern Midtown.**

This erasure extends to the **Municipal Archives' I-Cards**

(Improvement Cards). For Josephine's specific lots on West 25th and West 30th Streets, the cards are missing or incomplete. These cards were the bureaucratic "biography" of a building; that they are gone means the city has not only demolished the stairs she climbed but has lost the paper trail of the repairs she oversaw and the hallways she mopped.

Josephine is a woman whose primary monument is the resilience she passed down through her DNA to her descendants.

Primary Sources: Vital Records & Sacramental Documents

- **Birth Certificate of William J. Hendrickson:** July 22, 1894. Certificate No. 34965, City of New York. (Address: 64 Gansevoort Street).
- **Birth Certificate of Josephine Sullivan:** January 18, 1897. Certificate No. 3514, City of New York. (Address: 449 West 16th Street).
- **Marriage Certificate of William Hendrickson & Josephine Sullivan:** February 17, 1918. The Shrine Church of the Sea (Guardian Angel Church), New York, N.Y. Officiant: Rev. J. A. Dougherty.
- **Baptismal Certificate of Margaret Theresa Hendrickson:** Born November 29, 1918; Baptized December 22, 1918. St. Bernard's Church, New York, N.Y. Sponsors: Cornelius Sullivan and Esther Akins.
- **Death Certificate of William Hendrickson:** January 21, 1920. Certificate No. 2342, Department of Health of the City of New York. (Cause of Death: Pulmonary Tuberculosis).
- **Death Certificate of Annie Byrne Hendrickson:** April 17, 1926. Certificate No. 11245, Department of Health of

the City of New York.

- **Death Certificate of Hamilton Hendrickson Sr.:** May 1, 1930. Certificate No. 12402, Department of Health of the City of New York. (Address: 130 Tenth Avenue).
- **Marriage Certificate of Peter Tague & Margaret Hendrickson:** March 25, 1937. St. Columba Church, New York, N.Y.
- **Death Certificate of Josephine Hendrickson:** May 1, 1941. Certificate No. 9838, Department of Health of the City of New York. (Cause of Death: Hypertrophy of the Heart / Congestive Heart Failure).

Primary Sources: Census Records

- **1900 U.S. Federal Census:** Manhattan, New York. (William Hendrickson household at 451 West 16th Street; Sullivan household at 449 West 16th Street).
- **1905 New York State Census:** Manhattan, New York. (Josephine Sullivan at 448 West 28th St.; William Hendrickson at 451 West 16th St.).
- **1910 U.S. Federal Census:** Manhattan, New York. (Josephine Sullivan household at 500 West 26th Street).
- **1920 U.S. Federal Census:** Manhattan, New York. (William and Josephine Hendrickson at 433 West 25th St., recorded Jan 6, 1920).
- **1925 New York State Census:** Manhattan, New York. (Josephine Hendrickson at 431 West 25th St., recorded June 1, 1925).
- **1930 U.S. Federal Census:** Manhattan, New York. (Josephine Hendrickson at 442 West 30th St.; Occupation: "Janitor" for 443 West 30th St.; Rent: "In L." [In Lieu]).

- **1940 U.S. Federal Census:** Manhattan, New York. (Josephine Hendrickson residing with Peter and Margaret Taigue at 420 West 29th Street).

Civic, Military, & Directory Records

- **World War I Draft Registration Card for William J. Hendrickson:** June 5, 1917. Precinct 18, New York City. (Occupation: “Film Maker” for Wentsner & King Inc. at 540 W 58th St).
- **Trow’s New York City Directory:** 1917 Edition listing William Hendrickson
- **New York City Voter Registers (1924 & 1925):** Manhattan Election Districts. (Documents Josephine Hendrickson’s registration as a Democrat at 433 West 25th Street).

Newspaper Archives & Legal Records

- **New York Tribune, September 25, 1909:** Identifies 408 and 410 West 14th Street as the headquarters of George F. Fish, establishing the building as a wholesale produce hub.
- **New-York Tribune, May 14, 1910:** Records 20-year industrial lease of 410 West 14th St. to Charles Wissmann (meat company operator).
- **New-York Tribune, February 29, 1912:** Documents the lease of lofts at 404–410 West 14th St. to the **Ward Piano Company**. (*Crucial context for William Hendrickson’s labor as a cabinet maker’s helper*).
- **Death Notice for William J. Hendrickson:** *New-York Tribune*, January 23, 1920, p. 8.
- **“Chelsea, the Poor Relation”:** *New-York Tribune*, Septem-

- ber 11, 1921. (Historical context for industrial conditions).
- **The Evening World, March 21, 1922:** Confirms that 410 West 14th St. remained commercial loft space after Margaret’s birth.
- **United States v. George F. Fish, Inc., 154 F.2d 798 (2d Cir. 1946):** Federal appellate case confirming George F. Fish as a major player in the wholesale produce trade into the 1940s.
- **Smithsonian Channel, “Part of Manhattan Was Once Known as ‘Death Avenue’” (2022):** [Video Link](#). Documentation of the Westside Cowboys [01:05], the 400+ death toll on 10th Avenue [02:45], and the 1929 decision to elevate the tracks [02:55].

Historical Maps & Architectural Context

- **Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps (1911):** Vol. 5 (Chelsea), Library of Congress.
- **Sheet 6:** Documents 433 West 25th St. and Hudson Guild proximity.
- **Sheet 17 & 19:** Details the industrial footprint of West 30th St. near “Death Avenue.”
- **NYC Municipal Archives Tax Photographs (1939–1941):** Block 723, Lot 15 (433 West 25th St.) and Block 726, Lot 64 (440 West 29th St.).

Historical Contextual Background

- **Epidemiology:** Crosby, Alfred W. *America’s Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918*. Cambridge University Press.

- **Public Health:** Noymer, Andrew. “The 1918 Influenza Pandemic Hastened the Decline of Tuberculosis in the United States.” *Vaccine*, 2011.
- **Architecture & Labor:** Federal Writers’ Project. *The WPA Guide to New York City* (1939). (Detailed descriptions of Gansevoort Market and “dumbbell” tenements).
- **Occupational Life:** The Tenement Museum, “Fanny Rogarshevsky’s 1911 Apartment.” (Historical research regarding the daily physical requirements of a widow-janitress).
- **Transportation History:** Smithsonian Channel (2022). Documentation of the “Westside Cowboys” who rode ahead of trains on 10th Avenue until 1933 [\[02:36\]](#).
- **Social Customs:** “Moving Day: A New York Tradition.” *New York Historical Society*.
- **Legal Context:** *The Tenement House Act of 1901*. (Reform requirements for 6 AM building heat).
- **Transportation History:** Museum of the City of New York (MCNY) Digital Collection. (Documentation of Tenth Avenue “Red Flag” riders).

Helen Chambers (1842-1914),
maternal 2x great Grandmother.

by Xanthe Hall

X-Factored - family stories

<https://xanthh.substack.com>



Grief © Xanthe Hall

My 2x great-grandmother Helen Chambers was actually named Ellen on her birth certificate, but on her baptism record, the name “Ellen” is crossed out and replaced with “Helen”. The name “Ellen” refused to go away, however, and appeared again on the 1851 census and the 1913 electoral register. I am not sure which of these two names she preferred, but I will call her Helen.

Born in Greenwich on 27 Sep 1842, she was the 5th of 11

children by two mothers. Her father was a Lieutenant in the Royal Marines and was most likely often away from home, although he had no problem conceiving a child almost every year. At least three of the children from his first marriage probably did not survive, as they are missing in the 1851 census.

Helen's first loss was her mother: Caroline Chambers nee Dutton. Caroline had seven children before she died at the age of 35 in 1852. She died of "fungoid disease of the womb, unknown". A fungal infection in the uterus would not have led to death, but it could have been a lymphoma in the uterus or, less likely, uterine blastomycosis.

300	Eleventh Lane 1852 Caroline	Caroline Chambers	35 Years	Wife of John Chambers a Lieutenant	Fungoid disease of the womb unknown	The mark of Elizabeth Roberts present at death W. Halliwell's
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Helen's first loss: her mother, Caroline, 1852

Helen was just 10 years old and her younger brothers, Walter and William only seven and five, when their mother died. It is quite likely that Helen and her elder sister Harriet were required to look after the younger children for at least the first year after her mother's death.

The following year her father remarried: Agnes Beeby (nee Carstairs), an engineer's widow with a small son. Her Scottish stepmother gave her three half-brothers and sisters. Whether there was any filial love between them, or if Agnes was a good mother to them, nobody knows. But by 1861 Ellen had become Helen, aged 19 and a teacher, like her sister Annette, and she was boarding in Guildford, Surrey. However, she didn't remain

a teacher for long.

On August 10, 1863, 23 year-old Helen married Edward William Ruegg, son of Richard Ruegg, a Clerk in the Customs Office. Edward was a government Clerk soon to become a Clerk with the Admiralty. The connection was quite likely made through their fathers, quite possibly it was seen as a good match for his youngest daughter from his first marriage, since a job in the Office of the Lord High Admiralty was sought after.

Twenty Edward January 1864 Dunstable Herts	Edward William Ruegg	Male 9 days	Son of Edward William Ruegg Black in Black guards	Seven 8 days Convulsions Certified	Mary Wilson Born 11th Dec 17 Wellington Street Greenwich	Twenty 9 days January 1864	Walter Thomas Regent
Twenty					the mark of		

Helen loses her first child, 1864.

On 22 Jan of the following year Helen's firstborn son, named Edward William after his father, died of icterus (jaundice, most likely caused by liver dysfunction). He lived only nine days, eight of which he was critically ill and had convulsions. Since there were less than six months between wedding and birth, he may also have been premature, or he had been conceived before marriage. He was buried on 27 Jan 1864 in Greenwich.

Close on the heels of this death, Helen's father also died, at 53, of bronchitis and dropsy. At 24, Helen was a full orphan and had lost her first child.

Helen's second son was Alfred James, my grandfather, who was born in 1865 and survived (luckily for me!). Two more sons followed in quick succession from 1866 to 1868.

In 1870 her first girl, named Helen (after herself) Maud, was born. She died just under a year later, and was also buried in Greenwich Cemetery. Her second daughter, Annett (named after Helen's sister) Eleanor was born in April 1872 and died four months later of diarrhoea and inanition (physical wasting due to starvation).

25 th	Fifteenth August 1872 2 Calvert Road	Annette Eleanor Ruegg	Female	4 months	Daughter of Edward William Ruegg, wife	Diarrhoea Inanition Certified	E. W. Ruegg Present at the death 2 Calvert Road Greenwich
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Helen's third lost child, 1872.

Of the next three girls, only one survived to their fifth year: Edith Rose. Julia May was four years old when she died; Clara Annabel was two. They both died in the first quarter of 1878 from Scarlet Fever, a major cause of childhood mortality at that time in and around London.

Her last two children also died: Francis Ernest Ruegg on 10 Aug 1880 of tubercular meningitis at four months old. And little Norah, who was premature, and died on 1 Jun 1882, just four days old.

In the time between 22 Jan 1864, when her first child was born, already ailing, and 5 Jun 1882, the burial of her last child, Helen had watched seven of her thirteen children die. She had no time to grieve her dead children before she was pregnant with the next. Sometimes she was grieving while pregnant.

In 1911, she wrote the numbers on the census form: 13

children, 6 living, 7 dead.

1) passed the night of Sunday, April 2nd, 1911, in this dwelling and was alive at midnight, or 2) arrived in this dwelling on the morning of Monday, April 3rd, not having been enumerated elsewhere. one else must be included. order of entering names see Examples on back of Schedule.)	State whether "Head," or "Wife," "Son," "Daughter," or other Relative, "Visitor," "Boarder," or "Servant."	state the age in months as "under one month," "one month," etc.	"Single," "Married," "Widower," or "Widow," or opposite the names of all persons aged 15 years and upwards.	Completed years the present Marriage has lasted.	Children born alive to present Marriage. (If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7.)			
		Ages of Males.	Ages of Females.	If less than one year write "under one."	Total Children Born Alive.	Children still Living.	Children who have Died.	
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
<i>Helen Ruff</i>	<i>Head</i>		<i>67</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>

1911 census form with numbers of children altogether, alive and dead.

The ones that survived were: Alfred James, Edward Heathcote, Charles Parker, Edith Rose, John Louis, and Ethel Daisy. They all outlived their mother.

Did Helen rise up again after all of this tragedy? While her husband, Edward William, had risen up the ranks of the civil service and became a Higher Division Admiralty Clerk, nothing is known of how Helen coped with all her loss. Certainly, the family was comfortable, as Edward brought in a good salary, and by 1881 they could afford a domestic servant in their house in Ennersdale Road. By 1901, Edward had retired from his position as Superintending Clerk at the early age of 56, and had taken a house in Prittlewell in Southend-on-Sea. Helen was still living with him at this time, as well as their two living daughters, now 26 and 21, both unmarried.

By 1911, Edward and Helen appear to be living apart. They had been married 47 years. Whether they lived apart all or

only part of the time, we do not know. But Edward was living either in a house in Streatham or on Hill Farm, Ashingdon, in West Rochford. According to the 1911 census, he lived alone at the farm in six rooms. His other address in Streatham, 40 Fernwood Ave, remained the same from 1907 until his death in 1923.

Helen was living in Wolfington Road, West Norwood, only half an hour's walking distance from Edward's house in Fernwood Avenue, with her two daughters, who had remained unmarried at 36 and 31. Ethel Daisy had become a Clerk. Also, Helen's grandson Edward Brice Ruegg (15, also a Clerk in an engineer's office) was living in the house, which had seven rooms. Edward Brice was Edward Heathcote's son, who had perhaps been sent to live with his father's family to learn the ropes as a Clerk.

Helen was registered to vote in the local government elections in 1913, the year that the Women's Suffrage Bill was defeated in parliament. Although she was still married, she had somehow managed to get on the electoral register. Whether this indicates that she was politically interested, or active for suffrage, is not known. But the fact that she registered at all shows that she was not a passive woman.

Helen died on 20 Jan 1914, aged 70, in a nursing home in Croydon. She died after an operation to remove her gallstones of heart failure, and was buried in Greenwich cemetery.

Writing this post has made me acutely aware of the intense loss that Helen must have suffered. Her resilience must have been quite incredible to just go on, but perhaps having the other children was able to put her grief aside to care for them. It is hard to know whether Edward was supportive of her loss, or if he suffered greatly himself. Losing her mother so early meant

HELEN CHAMBERS (1842-1914), MATERNAL 2X GREAT GRANDMOTHER.

she did not have her support, but she did have three sisters: Annett, Harriette and Julia. Annett features at least on the 1871 census as living with Helen.

Sources:

All of the sources for this post can be found on Wikitree, on [Helen \(Chambers\) Ruegg](#)'s profile and those of her children.

II

The Women Who Carried the Family Through

*Some women did not simply survive hardship. They
became the architecture that kept everyone else
standing.*

The Women Who Carried the Family Through

Some women did not simply survive hardship. They became the architecture that kept everyone else standing. They were the ones who held the household together when the money ran out, when the siblings needed somewhere to go, when the children died and the next child still needed feeding. They did not do this by making headlines. They did it by showing up, decade after decade, in the same house, at the same table, with the door still open.

The stories in Part 2 come from two very different worlds, yet they tell the same story. One unfolds in a Brooklyn duplex. The other crosses the breadth of colonial India. Both center on women who made themselves into the load-bearing walls of their families.

These are their stories.

Mary Plunkett Dowling, by Kirsten M. Max-Douglas, follows a Brooklyn woman who lost her own mother at five and spent the next four decades building the stable household she never had. Through infant loss, the Depression, two world wars, and the deaths of siblings who had moved in and never left, Mary kept the door open. The house is still in the family today.

Martha Gill, by Xanthe Hall, traces a woman who grew up as an army child in colonial India, married a soldier, buried babies across thousands of miles of cantonment road, was widowed pregnant in Mooltan, remarried a man who drank and had to be run off, and then reinvented herself as Simla's untrained midwife and nurse to keep her children fed and clothed. What carried her family through was not ease or resources. It was her.

Together, these two women show us what carrying the family through actually looks like: not a single dramatic act, but a sustained, often invisible commitment to keeping the door open and the household intact, no matter what comes through it.

Her Secret to Family Survival? Keep the Door Open

By Kirsten M. Max-Douglas

Our Growing Family Tree

<https://ourgrowingfamilytree.com>

My great-grandmother Mary Plunkett Dowling lost her mother when she was about five years old. She spent the next forty years making sure no one else in her family would face that kind of unmooring. This is the story of a woman who carried an entire household through grief, hardship, and time. She was the woman who held the family together through decades of loss, hardship, and change. Hers is a story of family survival, practiced quietly, year after year.

Mary Plunkett Dowling *My Father's Mother's Mother*

She Held What She Never Had

Mary Plunkett was born in 1870 in Brooklyn, the youngest surviving child of Peter Plunkett and his first wife, Julia Smith. She was barely five years old when Julia died, around 1875. Peter would remarry. Anna Smith became Mary's stepmother, and the household at 418 Van Brunt Street continued. But Mary grew up knowing, in the way children know things without being told, that families can break open without warning.

She spent the rest of her life making sure hers did not.

A Childhood Shaped by Loss

Peter Plunkett had built something real in Brooklyn. He arrived from Ireland and worked his way from junk dealer to paper manufacturer, establishing his business and his family on Van Brunt Street in Red Hook. By the time Mary was a child, the household was stable and purposeful, full of older siblings, a working father, a stepmother managing the daily routines.

But the absence of Julia Smith was a fact Mary lived with from the beginning. She grew up among a generation of older siblings: twins Bernard and James, born 1851; John W., born 1853; Peter, born 1856; Bridget, born 1858; Julia, born 1868; Stephen, born 1869. Two younger half-sisters, Margaret in 1881 and Letitia in 1884, came after Mary through her father's second marriage to Anna Smith. The household carried on. Children in that era had little choice.

What Mary did with that knowledge is clear in the forty years that followed her own marriage. She understood that households can be lost and that a mother's absence reshapes everything. For Mary, family survival began as something she

witnessed. It became something she practiced.

The House She Made

Around 1896, Mary Plunkett married Thomas Francis Dowling, the son of William Dowling and Ellen McAuliffe, two Irish immigrants from Listowel, County Kerry. Thomas worked as a house painter. They began their family in Brooklyn, and in 1898 their first son, Peter Francis, was born.

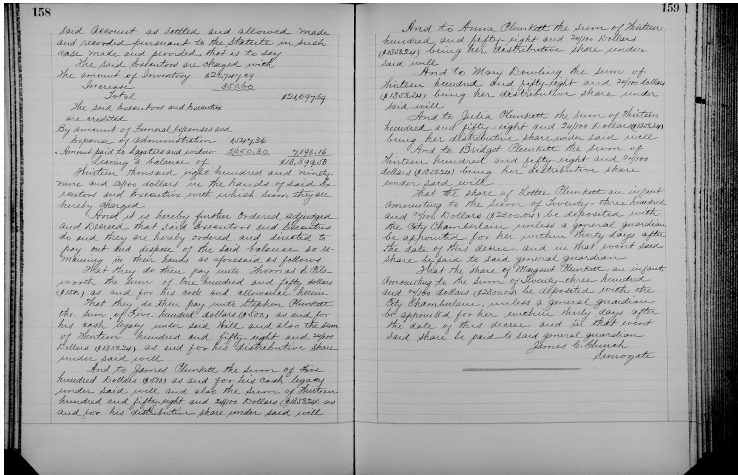
Peter Francis died before his second birthday.

Mary and Thomas buried their infant son in the Plunkett family plot at Holy Cross Cemetery in Flatbush, Range 33, Grave 7, where her own father would rest just a few years later.

They moved forward. William Bernard arrived in 1901. Marie followed in 1905.

That same year, the family moved to the Brooklyn address that would anchor all of them for the rest of their lives. Mary, Julia, and Bridget had each received inheritances from their father Peter's estate in 1903, approximately \$1,358.24 each, roughly \$50,000 in today's value, and those funds likely helped make the purchase possible.

ANCESTRAL WOMEN



Pages from the Final Accounting for the Estate of Peter Plunkett, Deceased. 1904

Then came Julia Elizabeth in 1907, the daughter who would become my grandmother.

The Door That Always Opened

If Mary had wanted a quiet household, she did not build one. The census records tell the story plainly.

By 1905, her sister Julia Plunkett had moved in, working as a copyist. Her income helped carry the household. In 1910, the family was still growing: Thomas still painting houses, children in school, Julia still present. Then came 1915.

The 1915 New York State Census recorded ten people living in the house: Thomas and Mary with their four children (William, Marie, Julia, and newborn Gwendolyn, just 28 days old) and four of Mary's Plunkett siblings: Julia, Bridget, James,

and Stephen.

204	Dowling, Howard	Head.	M	44	N.S.		Pauline	1884
"	Dowling, Mary	Wife	F	44	N.S.		Howard	8
"	Dowling, William	Son	M	12	N.S.		School	X
"	Dowling, Maria	Son	F	9	N.S.		Wood	X
"	Dowling, Julia	Son	F	7	N.S.		School	X
"	Plunkett, Julia A.	Daughter	F	42	N.S.		Howard	7
"	Plunkett, David E.	Son	M	52	N.S.		Howard	X
"	Plunkett, Angus	Son	M	64	N.S.		Robert	18
"	Plunkett, Stephen	Son	M	40	N.S.		Robert	18
"	Plunkett, Elizabeth	Son	F	38	N.S.			
"	Leavenworth, Edwin C.	Head	M	29	N.S.		McClintock	18
"	Leavenworth, Estelle	Wife	F	33	N.S.		Howard	8

1915 N.Y. state census, Dowling household

That same year, in June, Mary's brother James Plunkett purportedly fell down the stairs inside the house and died from his injuries.

James Plunkett,

James Plunkett, 64 years old, a well-known paper manufacturer in Brooklyn, died of apoplexy Friday at the home of his sister, Mrs. Thomas A. Dowling, 204 [REDACTED] He was born in Brooklyn February 14, 1851. On the death of his father, in 1903, he succeeded him in the paper manufacturing business, founded by him in 1848. He was a member of Branch No. 186, Catholic Knights of America; of the Holy Name Society, and attended the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, Fort Hamilton parkway and East Fourth street. A requiem mass will be said there on Monday morning, at 10 o'clock. Mr. Plunkett is survived by five sisters, Elizabeth E., Julia A., Margaret, Mrs. Mary A. Dowling, Mrs. Lotty Drady, and two brothers, John and Stephen.

James Plunkett obituary, 1915. Address redacted for privacy.

Mary had already buried two infants. Peter Francis died before his second birthday in 1900. Margaret Gwendolyn, born in 1909, died before her first birthday the following year. The family buried her in Olive Square at Holy Cross Cemetery, in the plot that would eventually hold her parents as well.

Now in 1915, another daughter arrived. Mary named her Gwendolyn as well. The records do not explain why. But the choice speaks for itself.

The household did not scatter. Julia and Bridget stayed on. The family adapted and kept going. This was family survival at its most unadorned.

In 1924, Julia Plunkett died in the house where she had lived for nearly two decades.

The Steady Work

None of this is dramatic in the way that history usually records. No newspaper headlines mention Mary Plunkett Dowling. She did not run a business or hold a public office. The census enumerators recorded her occupation as “housework,” decade after decade.

But managing a household of ten people in a Brooklyn duplex was skilled, relentless, invisible work. It meant coordinating laundry without machines, putting meals on the table on a painter’s wage and a copyist’s salary, and caring for four children while sheltering aging and grieving siblings.

By 1930, the Great Depression had arrived. The second unit of the duplex stood empty. Depression-era economics made finding tenants nearly impossible. The 1930 census listed the property in Bridget Plunkett’s name. Plunkett family money, likely from the inherited paper-making business, had become the financial foundation keeping the Dowling home intact. Mary’s family and her birth family had become so thoroughly intertwined that their resources had become indistinguishable.

ANCESTRAL WOMEN

[illegible]

1930 U.S. Census for Dowling/Plunkett household.

The house held. In the Depression years, that was family survival.

The Final Years

By 1940, Thomas Dowling was 79 years old. Mary was in her early seventies. Their daughters Julia and Gwendolyn still lived at home, their wages now likely carrying the household that Thomas and Mary had built together.

Thomas died in 1944. The family held his funeral from the house.

Mary Plunkett Dowling died the following year, 1945, at the same Brooklyn address where she had lived for forty years. Her death certificate records cerebral hemorrhage, non-traumatic, with hypertension as the underlying cause and carcinoma of the left breast as a contributory condition.

BUREAU OF RECORDS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH CITY OF BROOKLYN FILED		Certificate of Death		Certificate No. 6152
1. NAME OF DECEASED First Name: MARY Middle Name: P. Last Name: DOWLING Social Security Number: NONE				
2. USUAL RESIDENCE: (a) State: New York (b) City: Kings (c) Post Office and Zone: Brooklyn 18 (d) No. 204 (e) Length of residence or stay in City of New York (immediately prior to death): Life		16. PLACE OF DEATH: (a) NEW YORK CITY: (b) Borough: Brooklyn (c) Name of Hospital or Institution: 204 (d) Length of stay at place of death immediately prior to death: 40 years		
3. SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED, OR DIVORCED (write the word): Widow		17. DATE AND HOUR OF DEATH: (Month) March (Day) 18th (Year) 1945 (Hour) 3:50 P.M.		
4. WIFE or HUSBAND of: Thomas Dowling		18. SEX: Female 19. COLOR OR RACE: White 20. Approximate Age: 74 years		
5. DATE OF BIRTH OF DECEASED: (Month) June (Day) 19th (Year) 1870		21. I HEREBY CERTIFY that (if attended the deceased)* (a) <u>staff physician of this institution</u> attended the deceased)* from <u>March 1, 1945</u> to <u>March 17, 1945</u> and last saw her alive at <u>7 P.M.</u> on <u>March 17, 1945</u>		
6. AGE: 74 yrs. 8 mos. 29 days If LESS than 1 day, hrs. or min.		Statement of cause of death is based on (Autopsy) (operation) (laboratory test) (clinical findings)* (Cross and term used that do not apply)		
7. OCCUPATION: (a) Trade, profession, or particular kind of work done, as <u>spinster</u> , <u>seamstress</u> , <u>bookkeeper</u> , etc. (b) Industry or business in which work was done, as <u>at home</u> , <u>seamstress</u> , <u>bank</u> , <u>own business</u> , etc.		Principal cause of death: <u>Cerebral hemorrhage (see remarks)</u> 3:13 P.M. <u>Hypertension</u> 10 years		
8. BIRTHPLACE OF DECEASED: (a) State: New York (b) County: Kings (c) City, Town or Village: Brooklyn		Contributory causes and other conditions: <u>Carcinoma of left breast</u>		
9. OF WHAT COUNTRY WAS DECEASED A CITIZEN AT TIME OF DEATH? U. S. A.		Autopsy: Date of: Operation: None		
10. WAS DECEASED A VETERAN OF SO, NAME WAR: None		Condition for which performed: (If none, so state) (If none, so state)		
11. NAME OF FATHER OF DECEASED: Peter Plunkett		Signature: <u>Samuel Benson</u> M. D. Address: <u>280 Ocean Drive</u> Date: <u>3/19/45</u>		
12. BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER OF DECEASED: France		Relationship to deceased: <u>Daughter</u> Address: <u>30 - 74th Street</u>		
13. MARRIED NAME OF MOTHER OF DECEASED: Julia Smith		Date of burial or cremation: <u>MARCH 21st, 1945</u>		
14. BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER OF DECEASED: Ireland		Address: <u>384 VAN BRUNT ST.</u> Permit number: <u>801</u>		
15. SIGNATURE OF INFORMANT: <u>Maria Hermann</u>		BUREAU OF RECORDS AND STATISTICS		
16. PLACE OF BURIAL OR CREMATION: HOLY CROSS CEMETERY		DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH		
17. FUNERAL DIRECTOR: GEORGE SIEBOLD & SON		CITY OF NEW YORK		

Mary Plunkett Dowling death certificate, 1945

She was approximately 75 years old. She had outlived her mother by seventy years. She had outlived Peter Francis and Margaret Gwendolyn, two infants buried before they reached their first birthdays. She had outlived two brothers, a sister, and her husband. She had kept the door of that house open through World War I, the influenza pandemic, the Depression, and World War II.

The family buried her at Holy Cross Cemetery in Brooklyn, in

Olive Square, Row C, Plot 32, the same ground where Thomas rested, and where several of her children and siblings would eventually gather as well.

What She Left

The house is still in the family. My aunt lives there today.

Mary Plunkett grew up knowing what it meant to lose a mother early. The records do not tell us what she thought about that, or whether she made a conscious decision to build something different. But forty years of census records, of siblings sheltered and children raised and crises absorbed, tell their own story.

She built what she never had: a household that did not break open.

That is the steady work of family survival. And it is why I am here to write this.

1. "Kings, New York, United States records," images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G99B-JDLF>)(<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G99B-JDLF>) : accessed 9 March 2026), image 408 of 897; New York, County Court (Kings County), Kings Probate Records 1904, pages 158–159, Final Accounting of Estate, Estate of Peter Plunkett, Deceased; IGN 005534044.
2. 1915 New York state census, Kings County, New York, Ward No. 29, Assembly District 12, Election District No. 55, Block 8, page 29 (penned), XXXXX, house number 204, Thomas F. Dowling family; imaged, "New York State Census, 1915," *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/search>

- [ch/collections/2703/](#): accessed 5 May 2024).
3. "Obituary: James Plunkett," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 13 June 1915, page 66; imaged, *Newspapers.com* (https://www.newspapers.com/clip/12134804/the_brooklyn_daily_eagle/): accessed 9 March 2026).
 4. 1930 U.S. census, Kings County, New York, Brooklyn Borough, Ward of city A.D. 12, Enumeration District 24-1641, Block B, Tract 448 (part of), page 1A (penned), XXXXX Road, house number 204, dwelling 2, family 2, Thomas F. Dowling family; imaged, "1930 United States Federal Census," *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/arch/collections/6224/>): accessed 6 May 2024).
 5. New York City, Department of Health, Certificate of Death no. 6152 (1945), Borough of Brooklyn, Mary P. Dowling, died 18 March 1945; imaged, *Historical Vital Records*, New York City Municipal Archives (<https://a860-historicalvitalrecords.nyc.gov/view/7186791>): accessed 9 March 2026).
- Note: Featured image was generated using [Openart.ai](#)

Martha Gill, My 2X Great-Grandmother, 1836-1901

by Xanthe Hall

X-Factored - family stories

<https://xanthh.substack.com>

If there is one woman in my family that is a paragon of endurance, it's Martha. Life in colonial India before the Raj was not like we know it from "Passage from India", all gin and tonic, and croquet on the lawn before a spot of polo. Martha was the daughter of a Sergeant-Major in the British East India Company Army. She was one of a rake of children¹ who, with their mother, Mary Byrn, were dragged around from camp to cantonment, while their father fulfilled his duty as a European NCO in the 42nd regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry. Her mother was also made of tougher stuff than the European women, coming as she did from the Lower Orphan School in Calcutta and most likely Eurasian².

The family story goes that on one of the long treks on the

road to Simla, the family rested in an old Moghul garden called Pinjoor (now known as the Pinjore gardens), and Martha met the man she was to marry.

Martha was lucky, in that she married at 17. A lot of girls were married off to soldiers at 15, and some even as young as 12 at that time. She married a Gunner from the Artillery called Angus Hugh Morrison from Scotland. He said he was 26 years old, but his military papers put him at about 29. They married in St. John's Church in Meerut, one of the largest Bengal Army cantonments near Delhi, on 18 May 1853.

By 1855, she was having her first child³, John George, in Sialkot, more than 530 kilometres away from where she married. Although there is no record of a death or burial, this child must have died, because Angus and Martha baptised another John George the following year, also in Sialkot.



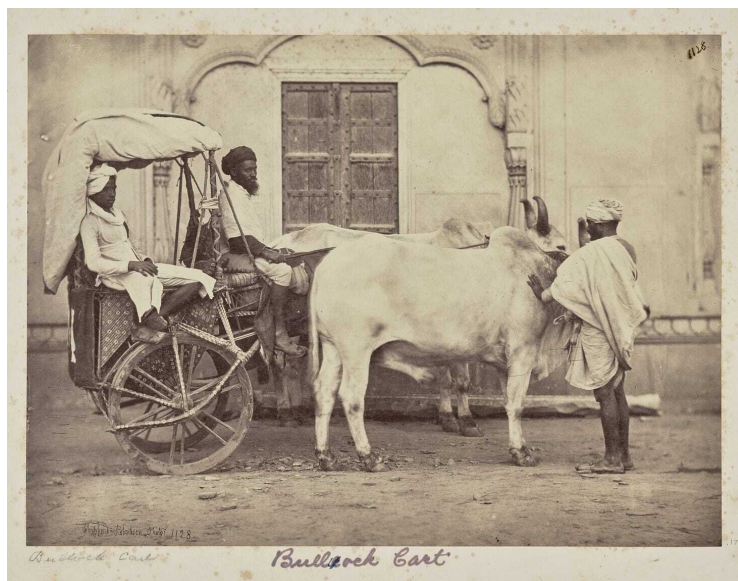
Battle scene between British and Indians, possibly of Indian Mutiny, 1857. Image: Wellcome Collection, CC BY 4.0

Martha was living with her sister in Meerut in 1857 when the Indian Mutiny broke out. It was at this time that she met the Tytlers where she and her sister found refuge, escaping the mutineers. Colonel Robert and Harriet Tytler were to feature prominently again later on in Martha's life.

There followed an odyssey not unlike her mother's, moving from camp to camp, stopping at cantonments to have babies, or to bury them. Henry William was born in Meerut in 1859, the first Elizabeth Mary born in Umballa in 1861 — she must have also died, because in 1863 there was a second Elizabeth Mary, born in Peshawur and baptised in Rawalpindi. The second Elizabeth Mary died of the measles and was buried in 1866 in

Rawalpindi.

Finally, while Martha was pregnant with the last of Angus' children, he died in Mooltan in 1868. She gave birth to her child in the same place and christened him Angus Hugh, like the father he would never see.



A small bullock cart. Image: George Shepherd, Getty Museum, public domain

All in all, Martha travelled back and forth over enormous distances, amounting to thousands of kilometres. They would travel with a large military convoy and the family might ride

in a spare baggage cart, an artillery wagon, a grain cart, or (most commonly) in a covered bullock wagons made of wood: the family sat or lay inside on bedding with their personal belongings stacked around them. They travelled slowly, maybe only four or five kilometres an hour. As an enlisted non-officer, it is unlikely Angus' family would have travelled in a private carriage. If the distance was short, Martha might have been required to walk while the children rode in the carts. Although the railways were beginning to be finished around this time, most cantonment transfers were still by road, unless part of the way had an accessible river, then they might travel by boat.

You might be tempted to think this sounds like the same life as for many settlers in North America or other colonies, but Martha never arrived at a destination where they might build a house and stay there. They were always moving with the Army, and the Artillery moved more than most other units. They would set up camp on the way, putting up tents, and the "camp followers", consisting of water haulers, cooks, barbers, washerwomen, food vendors and, of course, the wives, children and other relatives, would get to work cooking meals, washing clothes, or tending to the livestock they had brought with them. There could be literally thousands of people, moving on hundreds of carts with weapons and provisions. When camp was set up, it was split into two areas for soldiers and for families. This was called 'Canton Life'.

Here's a description of a route march in colonial India written by an officer's wife:

"However, the wives might have had fair reason to complain when being jolted for days in bullock carts slowly creaking through the dust. At the bottom of the carts was

a layer of boxes with a couple of mattresses on top, all covered by thatched straw. From time to time a wheel fell off and pots, pans, baggage and children went flying in all directions."

After Angus died, we have no record of what happened to Martha, or how she survived with her children between her husband's death in July 1868 and April 1872, when she remarried. It is possible that she was able to turn to her sister Harriet in Meerut — who was by now on her fourth husband — for help, but although my grand-aunt Flora has recounted much of Martha's life, she did not (or could not) enlighten us about this time.

It is also not known how Martha met her second husband, Henry Bwyne, but they married on 22 Apr 1872 in Simla, in the foothills of the Himalayas, a beautiful hill station in the Punjab. Henry was a horticulturalist and landscape gardener, living at Annandale. He was 44 and she was 35. The witnesses at their wedding were Colonel Robert Tytler and his wife Harriet.

Robert Christopher Tytler was a Colonel in the British Army and Harriet Christina Earle was his second wife. She was a photographer and wrote about the mutiny in 1857 after their narrow escape, although Martha and her sister Harriet are not mentioned⁶. All the same, the friendship was obviously deep enough for her and her husband to attend and witness Martha and Henry's marriage, despite the obvious class difference.



Henry Bwye, horticulturalist. Image: © Hall family archive

Henry was a gardener in Simla. My grand-aunt Flora claims that he laid out the gardens at Annandale, although there are others that make the same claim for Alfred Parsons, who was the municipal gardener in later years. But I won't go into that here, as it is Martha's story I am telling.

Martha went on to have four more children with Henry: Willie (1872), Flora Harriet, my great-grandmother (1874), Fred (1875), and Ada Gill (1877). Martha would have been about 40 years old when she gave birth to her last child, to whom she gave her maiden name as a middle name. Most likely she also had one of her earlier children for some of the time at home, as well as at least one of Henry's children from his first marriage.

I haven't yet managed a verified head count because I've still not identified all of the children from the two earlier marriages, or how many survived, and there are no censuses for India. But I reckon that in 1877 she had at least seven children to look after, ranging from 0 to 10, of which four were 5 or less. But at least she had a home in one place and no longer had to traipse around the country with her children in cart and live in tents. She was living in the Club House in Annandale.

The story goes, however, that Henry was a drinker. My grand-aunt writes in her memories:

"My mother said he was a very handsome man, but very wild when drunk, and ill-treated my grandmother so much that her two grown-up step-sons ran him out of the house and secured his return passage to Britain. The family never heard of him again, poor man!"

More like poor woman! Martha had to now find a way of earning a living to support her family as there were no public funds for a woman with several mouths to feed. The Club House was taken over around this time by the new municipal gardener, Alfred Parsons, so Martha also had to find a new place to live.

This was where her friendship with Harriet Tytler came into play. Being a woman of means, she arranged for the children to be educated in local schools. Martha then became the midwife and nurse for Simla, although she had no training whatsoever. In this way, she was able to support herself and her family, getting them through this difficult time.

All of the four children from her marriage with Henry survived, married and had children of their own. The sons got

good jobs and the daughters married well, so by the measure of the times, Martha had successfully carried her family through to become part of Simla society.

Flora tells that her mother (Flora Harriet Bwyne) always spoke of her mother “as being a lady proud and undaunted by her bitter experiences in her early life”. She, of all the ancestral women in my family, fought through thick and thin for the survival of her kin. The tenuous umbilical cord that runs through the women in our line was never more challenged than in 19th century India. Martha, and Mary before her, were the real enduring survivors of my maternal lineage.



The grown-up Bwyne family. Left to right: Flora Harriet, Willie, Martha (sitting), Fred and Ada Gill. Photo: © Hall family archive

Sources: All sources for Martha's vital records can be found here, on her [Wikitree profile](#), as well as my Grand-Aunt Flora's

memories.

NOTES:

1 Still not managed to find all of George and Mary's children. At my last count there were nine, but I am pretty sure there are more. These are their names, year of birth and place they were born: John Matthew, 1826 in Mirzapur; Robert, 1828 in Mirzapur, baptised in Cawnpore; Matilda, 1830 in Neemuch; Harriet, 1832 in a camp near Delhi; Martha, 1836 in Bareilly; James, 1838 in Bareilly; then a long gap, and finally: Priscilla Theodora, 1846 in place unknown.

2 The children at the Lower Orphan Schools (LOS) were mostly not orphans. The Upper Orphan Schools were for children of officers, but the children in the LOS were mostly Eurasian, and taken away from their parents at age three or four. Having been brought up in Calcutta and survived meant that Mary was accustomed to high heat and partially immune to disease.

3 My grand-aunt Flora recalled that there were two other children, possibly born before John George, called Frank and Harry, although their birth dates would put them before the marriage. She is probably mixing these two up with Martha's second husband's children from his first marriage, Harry and Frank Clifford Bwyne.

4 A description of 'Canton Life' can be found in "A Soldier of the Company: Life of an Indian Ensign, 1833-43, Albert Hervey, 1988, or "Ten Years in India", 3 volumes, also by the same author, published in 2015.

5 Makepeace M: [A British Army Officer's wife's account of a route march in colonial India](#), 25 Feb 2021, quoting Edith E. Cuthell who wrote the book "Up to the Hills" in 1893.

6 Harriet wrote several memoirs when she was in her 70s,

the best known of which is “An Englishwoman in India. The Memoirs of Harriet Tytler 1828-1858”, Oxford Letters and Memoirs, 1986.

III

Women With Agency

*Agency is not always visible. It does not always look
like freedom or triumph.*

Women With Agency

Agency is not always visible. It does not always look like freedom or triumph. Sometimes it looks like a woman packing up her children and sailing into the unknown. Sometimes it looks like a woman who leaves a violent husband, sends her children away to survive, and rebuilds herself from scratch. Sometimes it looks like a thirteen-year-old girl, alone in steerage, crossing an ocean toward parents she hasn't seen in a year.

The stories in Part 3 explore what it means for ancestral women to exercise agency, not in ideal conditions, but in the constrained and often dangerous conditions that defined their lives. These women did not simply react to circumstance. Within whatever room they had, they acted.

These are their stories.

Ada Elicia Phelps, by Xanthe Hall, follows a Birmingham auctioneer who married badly, endured years of domestic violence, left her husband for the London stage, built a dress-making firm on New Bond Street, petitioned for divorce, and won custody of her four sons. Her story traces the arc of a woman who found agency, lost it, and found it again, until the long shadow of her first marriage finally caught up with her.

Anna Jacintha (de Mello) Pacheco, by Melody Lassalle, tells

the story of a probable widow, or perhaps a woman whose husband simply vanished, who chose none of the expected options for a woman alone in the Azores with six children. Instead, she signed a sugar plantation contract, put her children on her passport, and sailed to Hawaii in the middle of a political standoff. She spent the last twenty years of her life in Kilauea, Kauai, and is buried there.

Anna Hurkala, by Kirsten M. Max-Douglas, traces the quieter, harder-to-name kind of agency: a thirteen-year-old girl from the Carpathian village of Litmanova, crossing the Atlantic alone in steerage to join her parents in Pennsylvania coal country. The decisions that brought her there were not entirely her own. But she went. She crossed. And from that crossing, she built a life that reached forward more than a century.

Together, these three women ask us to look more carefully at what agency actually means when the choices available are few, the stakes are high, and the records are thin. It means exactly what these women did.

Ada – A Woman with Agency

by Xanthe Hall

X-Factored - family stories

<https://xanthh.substack.com>

What does it actually mean: to have agency? It doesn't just mean someone who can make decisions, we all do that. It means someone who has the capacity to make decisions that use their full potential. Someone who doesn't allow determinism to define her life, but is convinced she can change it for the better. She doesn't simply select one of an array of pre-selected choices, but makes up her mind to go her own way without knowing the outcome.

Deciding which of the women in my ancestral line have "agency" was not so easy, but I boiled it down to three. Previously, I wrote about Martha, my 2x great-grandmother in my maternal line, who was a woman who decided to become a midwife after her second husband died. But did she do this because there was no choice? Circumstances dictated that she

had to find a way to feed her family and, although she had no training, she recognised that her particular set of skills would be best used in nursing and midwifery. Secondly, there is Elizabeth Ivin, another 2x great-grandmother on my mother's side. When her chimney sweep husband William died young, she became a clothes dealer. She remarried and moved from Cheltenham to Birmingham about 1889, where the 'rag trade' was flourishing, and carried on her trade. But the one I felt took an unexpected turn in her life, against all odds, was Ada Elicia, my maternal great-grandmother.



Ada, probably during the time she was on the stage. Photo: Hall family archive

I've written about Ada before, and also alluded to her several

times in the series about her sons, the Blenkiron Brothers. Just to recap: born Ada Elicia Phelps in 1872 in Cheltenham, daughter of the afore-mentioned Elizabeth Ivin, Ada married young. She was 19 when she married Duncan Blenkiron, a commercial traveller and auctioneer. Ada was also an auctioneer in Birmingham and most likely met Duncan in one of the many auction houses in Birmingham. The fact that, at 18, she was able to get up on a stage and take control of the bidding in a room full of older men indicates that she was not shy. Perhaps it was the first sign of her potential to go on the stage.

Ada and Duncan had five children, all boys. The third of the boys, Alfred Ernest, died under a year old. By the time her fifth child, Bernard (my grandfather) was born, in 1898, Duncan and Ada were living in Huddersfield. Possibly, this is where things came to a head. It is only a small anomaly, but the birth registration is usually with a few days of a birth, yet although Bernard was born on 23 May the birth wasn't registered till 5 July, and the address was a different one from where he was born. Ada had moved from Huddersfield to Scarborough. The address was given as 3 Aberdeen Walk "per declaration" by the mother, whose age was given as 44, though she was actually 20 years younger. Most probably this was a mistake, as was the spelling of Duncan's middle name as 'Stuart', rather than 'Stewart', suggesting that he wasn't the one that registered the birth. So this could indicate had Ada left him or they had temporarily separated, but it is not conclusive.

The ins and outs of Ada's decision to divorce Duncan, which she eventually petitioned for in 1903, are not clear. What we do know is contained in her affidavit in the divorce papers. But before we look at those, there is another document of interest

in this timeline: the 1901 census.

On 31 Mar 1901, when the census was taken, Ada was living in London and working as an actress. She was living at 121 Regent Street and had a servant named Nelly Jones. There are no children named on the census, but as I can't find Bernard, who would have been only just under 3 years old, maybe Nelly's job was to look after him while Ada was at work. Her other three children could be found at boarding schools in various parts of the country.

Could this be our Ada? Her surname is given as Blenkiron, her age is correct, and she was born in Cheltenham. There are no other Ada Blenkiron from Cheltenham, born in 1872 or thereabouts, that I can find. Nor can I find anyone resembling our Ada in any other census record. So I think we can safely assume that she has left Duncan and taken up a life on the stage.

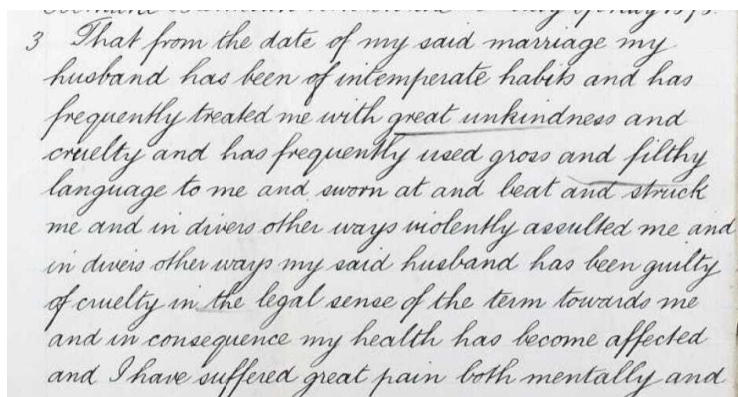
If this is correct, Ada had taken a massive choice. She had not only left her husband, she had sent all but possibly one of her children away, and begun a new life in London. I have not been able to discover more about her life as an actress, or what theatre she worked at. It is possible she used a pseudonym. Or indeed if she had any employment at all in the theatre or, like many other women, was frequenting theatres in the West End prospecting for a new husband. As I myself was formally trained in acting and worked in theatre, I prefer to believe that Ada was what she said she was: an actress. But if she was, she wasn't for long.

In August 1904, immediately after her divorce became final, Ada remarried: to a wealthy merchant from Scotland called Sutherland Fraser Harris. On the divorce papers, Ada had given her occupation as a milliner. So she had given up the stage to make hats. It seems not only hats, but also dresses, a newspaper

article reports. According to the *Western Times*, she had her own dressmaking firm in New Bond Street. On the marriage certificate, only months later, no occupation is given.

Whatever her occupation, the divorce petition gives cause for the dissolution of her marriage as: “Adultery coupled with cruelty against the petitioner”, Ada being the petitioner and Duncan the respondent. Ada petitioned for divorce on 28 Aug 1903 and applied for custody of all four children to the Royal Courts of Justice at The Strand, Middlesex.

The petition goes on to say that from the first day of their marriage Duncan had been “of intemperate habits” – meaning that he was often drunk – and frequently treated Ada “with great unkindness and cruelty”. He “frequently used gross and filthy language”, swearing at her and “beat and struck, and in diverse other ways violently assaulted” her. The latter suggests sexual assault. In sum, Duncan had been “guilty of cruelty in the legal sense of the term”. So much so that she claimed her health “became affected and suffered great pain both mentally and physically”.



3 That from the date of my said marriage my husband has been of intemperate habits and has frequently treated me with great unkindness and cruelty and has frequently used gross and filthy language to me and sworn at and beat and strick me and in divers other ways violently assaulted me and in divers other ways my said husband has been guilty of cruelty in the legal sense of the term towards me and in consequence my health has become affected and I have suffered great pain both mentally and

Ada's affidavit for the petition to divorce, 27 Aug 1903.

As if this was not enough, somehow Ada had found out that Duncan had committed adultery “on or about 6 Nov 1902 at a coffee house in King William Street Greenwich” with a woman named Maud Chambers. How she had found this out is not included in the petition, but she may well have hired a private detective to follow her husband.

Legal cruelty was often the woman's plea when she wanted a divorce, but a single act of cruelty is not enough to warrant dissolving a marriage, it must be continuous over a period of time. The Judge was satisfied with the petition and dissolved the marriage, giving Ada custody of the children.

One newspaper report on the proceedings makes clear, however, by citing details of the violence that Ada suffered, that this was not just a plea to get custody, but a clear case of domestic violence:

„The husband had on a number of occasions been guilty of violence to his wife. He had struck her with his fist, and used bad language to her. Once he twisted her arm, and he had also pushed her downstairs and severely bruised her.“[1](#)

LOCAL DIVORCE CASE.

SEQUEL TO A MARRIAGE AT PONTYPRIDD.

In the Divorce Division of the High Court of Justice, on Monday, before the President, the case of Blenkiron v. Blenkiron was heard. This was a suit of Mrs. Ada Blenkiron, manageress of a dressmaking firm in New Bond-street, for a dissolution of her marriage with Mr. Duncan Blenkiron, a travellers' salesman, on the ground of cruelty and misconduct. The suit was undefended. Mr. Burnard appeared for the petitioner, and explained that the marriage took place in July, 1892, at Pontypridd. Afterwards the parties lived together in New Bond-street, London, and other places. There were four children. The husband had on a number of occasions been guilty of violence to his wife. He had struck her with his fist, and used bad language to her. Once he twisted her arm, and he had also pushed her downstairs and severely bruised her. With regard to the misconduct, on the 6th of November, 1902, the respondent met a young woman whom he took to the Empire Theatre at Deptford. He then took her to a house, where, it is alleged, misconduct took place.

Petitioner gave evidence in support of counsel's statement, and the young woman referred to was called and spoke to the misconduct. A decree nisi was granted.

*Western Mail: Local Divorce Case. Sequel to a marriage at
Pontypridd, 2 Feb 1904*

Alleged details of the adultery were also given in the newspaper on how Duncan had taken a woman (the said Maud Chambers) to the Empire Theatre at Deptford. Afterwards he had taken her to a house „where, it is alleged, misconduct took place“. The young woman was called upon to speak to the misconduct in front of the court. However, Duncan did not defend himself against Ada's allegations and a decree nisi was granted.

The petition states that Ada “lived and co-habited with her husband (...) at diverse places and finally at 95 New Bond Street, London”. This is also the address given on the certificate of marriage to Sutherland in 1904. So did Ada at some point let Duncan back into her life after she had left him to become an actress, or when she had set up her dressmaking business? It is not unusual for women who are battered by their husbands to believe they have changed when they are repentant, or even blame themselves for their predicament, and go back to their husbands until the next time they are beaten. This behaviour pattern can go on for years before the woman finally manages to leave the marriage.

The story of Ada, patchy on detail though it might be, shows a woman who at some point decides to save herself from a violent and unhappy marriage. Although she wanted custody of her children, she first had to send them away in order to earn money and establish herself as a woman of independent means. After a brief period in the theatre, she set herself up as a milliner and/or dressmaker in one of the most fashionable streets in London. It is possible that she had financial help from

her future husband Sutherland, but that is pure speculation. Perhaps she was wildly successful and was able to earn enough from her acting to establish her business on her own.

By 1911, the census tells us that she lived comfortably with her new husband in a large house in Surrey with all of her children, the youngest was 12. The couple had no more children. However, no occupation is given in the census for Ada, just a line of dots. Sutherland was a manager of a varnish gum business and would have been wealthy enough for her to give up her business, if that was what she wanted.

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the backings of the Columns. The entries should be written in ink.

The names of the Schedules will be treated as confidential. Great care will be taken that no information is disclosed with respect to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP TO HEAD OF FAMILY	AGE	SEX	MARRIAGE	BIRTHPLACE		EDUCATION		OCCUPATION		REMARKS		SIGNATURE
					Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
1. <i>Sutherland, James Thomas</i>	Head	41	M	Married	1870	1870	1870	1870	1870	1870	1870	1870	
2. <i>Ada Lissie Harris</i>	Wife	38	F	Married	1873	1873	1873	1873	1873	1873	1873	1873	
3. <i>Frank, William</i>	Son	17	M	Single	1894	1894	1894	1894	1894	1894	1894	1894	
4. <i>James, William</i>	Son	16	M	Single	1895	1895	1895	1895	1895	1895	1895	1895	
5. <i>James, William</i>	Son	15	M	Single	1896	1896	1896	1896	1896	1896	1896	1896	
6. <i>James, William</i>	Son	14	M	Single	1897	1897	1897	1897	1897	1897	1897	1897	
7. <i>James, William</i>	Son	13	M	Single	1898	1898	1898	1898	1898	1898	1898	1898	
8. <i>James, William</i>	Son	12	M	Single	1899	1899	1899	1899	1899	1899	1899	1899	

1911 census with Ada Lissie Harris after six years of marriage to Sutherland Fraser Harris, showing no occupation.

Did Ada reach her full potential? She certainly had the agency to get out of a bad marriage and keep her children, although sending them away at such an early age must have been very difficult for all of them. But what of her life as an actress or as the owner of a dressmaking firm? Were these just means to an end until she married her wealthy businessman? Little

is known of her relationship to Sutherland. Her relationship to her sons was, however, recorded in their stories. She was dedicated to their well-being, appearing in court to plea for her son Harold when he was caught stealing, after returning from the war and becoming destitute. Alfred Victor referred to her as his 'best friend'. But however she may have wanted to, she could not protect her sons from consequences of war, nor could she wind back that time when they were separated from their mother, at a critical juncture in their childhood development.

Ada lost Sutherland when he died in 1918, and two years later she lost her son Alfred Victor, who killed himself. At some point she moved to Chinnor, Oxfordshire. When her son Bernard visited from India in 1931, he gave this as his home address. But in the 1939 register, Ada was an inmate in the Warneford Mental Hospital in Oxford. The abuse of her marriage may have caught up with her, added to the loss of both husband and son.

Finally, she also took her own life by taking an overdose of chlorodyne (a mixture of laudanum, cannabis and chloroform – a highly addictive substance). The agency she had found in her young years was also lost and she could not save herself. In 1942, at 69 years old, she left the world behind, again consumed by war.

For all sources, see the Wikitree profile for Ada Elicia (Phelps) Fraser Harris aka Blenkiron.

1 Western Mail: Local Divorce Case. Sequel to a marriage at Pontypridd, 2 Feb 1904

A Widow's Journey

by Melody Lassalle

Mel's Genealogy Research Journal

<https://melrootsnwrites.substack.com>

Anna Jacintha (de Mello) Pacheco was living alone with 6 of her 7 children in the village of Achada in the Azores in 1882. My great great grandmother called herself a widow, but was she a widow because her husband died or because he disappeared? No matter. He was gone.

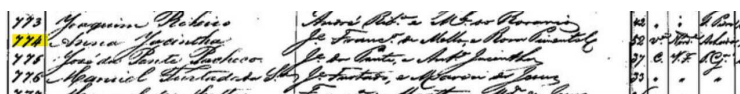
What were the options for a woman in a small village with hungry children to feed and no husband to support them?

She could have imposed on her oldest son, Antonio, who was now the head of the family. But, family lore says he had taken up whaling and was in Massachusetts by 1882.

She could have leaned on her relatives. She had two sisters in Achada who she might have moved in with if they had the means and room for 7 more.

Remarriage was always an option as was giving children away.

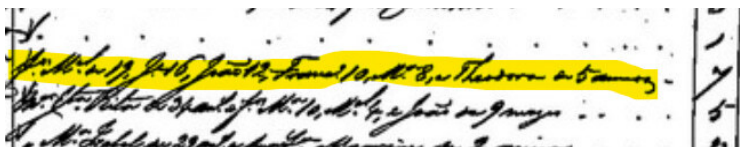
Instead, my great grandmother chose to immigrate to Hawaii. This passport was issued in her name on June 20th—her children tagging along on her passport.



The first part of Anna Jacintha's passport entry, 1882, no. 774

As these ships were specifically contracted to bring sugar plantation laborers to Hawaii, I believe this means that Anna Jacintha signed a sugar plantation contract at the age of 47 though I can't confirm this. There was no way she could have paid for passage for herself and her children. Signing a contract meant they got free passage.

Since individuals under contract were encouraged to bring their whole family, they were typically assigned to the same plantation. She would be able to keep her family together in Hawaii.



This is the second half of the passport entry which shows the abbreviated names of her children: Manoel 19, Jose 16, Joao 12, Francisco 10, Maria 8, and Theodoro 5.

The second half of Anna Jacintha's passport entry lists her children.

It wasn't an easy voyage. It never was in steerage. Imagine spending 60 or so days in steerage with hundreds of strangers. Not exactly enticing.

But, the SS Hansa headed into a political conflict that none of the passengers on board anticipated. It was the first voyage that took sugar plantation contract laborers from mainland Portugal to Hawaii. The original agreement stated that those from the Azores and Madeira were allowed to emigrate to Hawaii and those from mainland Portugal were allowed to emigrate to Brazil. But, the agreement was modified. Political forces in Lisboa were not happy.

When the Hansa arrived in port, the opposition blocked any new passengers from getting on the ship. They insisted on inspections that weren't required. They damaged the ship by ripping out boards, then claimed the ship was unsafe. Passengers signed required paperwork, which was then refused as unsuitable under Portuguese law.

As the sides battled over the Hansa's fate, the passengers were forced off the ship. Because the contracts they signed weren't accepted by local officials, they were denied food and shelter. This could only be provided once that paperwork was processed.

This must have been so upsetting to my great grandmother and her children! They were hungry and anxious. A week had passed without resolution. They should have been part way to

South America. Instead they'd only gone from the Azores to Portugal.

A. Hoffnung was the agent overseeing this voyage. He wrote a letter on July 2nd while stranded in Lisboa. The last paragraph gives you an idea of the unsettling situation Anna Jacintha and the other immigrants found themselves in.

"That under the foregoing circumstances I have reluctantly arrived at the conclusion that it is the desire of the authorities, or some of them, to hinder delay and obstruct the intention of the Hansa in taking emigrants to the Hawaiian Islands which I came here prepared to do in accordance with the laws of the Kingdom of Portugal and of the Hawaiian Islands, and having thus been hindered, obstructed and delayed, and compelled thereby to leave the port of Lisbon without being permitted in the ordinary course to accomplish my lawful business, I have suffered great loss and damage, and hold the Portuguese Government and its subordinates responsible for said loss and damage as soon as the same shall have been ascertained.

Lisbon, July 2d, 1862.

[Signed] A. HOFFNUNG.

Sworn before me

[Signed] JAMES O'DONNELL,
British Consul at Lisbon."

Letter from A. Hoffnung reprinted in the Pacific Commercial Advertiser, 9 Sep 1882, page 3

Eventually, local officials gave in. The Hansa set sail from

Portugal on July 11th. The rest of the voyage was unremarkable. The ship arrived in Honolulu at the beginning of September.

Once in Hawaii, Anna Jacintha and her children were processed at the Portuguese Consulate in Honolulu. They waited there with the other passengers to find out which plantation would be their new home.

The Pachecos were assigned to the Kilauea Sugar Plantation on Kauai. Once in Kilauea, they were provided housing. They started working soon after.

Although there are no records in Kilauea that give details of Anna Jacintha's life once she settled in, we know she was there. Tucked away in the Kilauea Catholic Cemetery is a broken tombstone lying next to a cross.



Anna Jacintha is buried at Kilauea Catholic Cemetery in Kilauea, Kauai, HI

Several years ago, a cemetery survey recorded the name on the stone “Anna Jacintha A. Pacheco”. She died at the age of 67, spending 20 years of her life in Kilauea. Her sons Joao and Jose, as well as numerous descendants, are also buried there.

Notes:

I have spent a couple of decades searching for proof in multiple villages that Jacintho Pacheco, Anna’s husband, died in the Azores. The last mention of Jacintho is on son Theodoro’s baptismal record in Achada, 1876. I suspect he abandoned them. The story passed down was that Anna Jacintha murdered him. You never know!

Although Anna Jacintha’s passport says she was 52, she was really 47 at the time she applied.

Litmanova Immigration: The Girl Who Followed Her Parents to America

By Kirsten M. Max-Douglas

Our Growing Family Tree

<https://ourgrowingfamilytree.com>

Anna Hurkala My Mother's Mother's Mother

In August 1901, the SS Gera arrived in Baltimore carrying passengers from Bremen, Germany. One entry on the manifest recorded a thirteen-year-old girl making the journey that defined Litmanova immigration to Pennsylvania: leaving the Carpathian mountains behind and sailing toward coal country. Her name was Anna Hurkala. Her destination: her parents.

She was thirteen years old.

ANCESTRAL WOMEN

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Norddeutscher Lloyd-Steamer Company.
LIST OF MANIFEST OF ALIEN IMMIGRANTS FOR THE COMMISSIONER OF IMMIGRATION.

Required by the regulations of the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, under Act of August 3rd, 1890, to be delivered to the Commissioner of Immigration by the Commanding Officer of every steamship arriving from foreign ports, and to be retained by the Commissioner of Immigration for the purpose of ascertaining the identity of the immigrants, and to be retained by the Commissioner of Immigration for the purpose of ascertaining the identity of the immigrants, and to be retained by the Commissioner of Immigration for the purpose of ascertaining the identity of the immigrants.

262

No.	Name	Age	Sex	Birthplace	Occupation	Married	Single	Widow	Orphan	Other	Remarks
1	Anna Hurkala	13	Female	Born 1888, residence Littmanova							Arrived August 1901
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“Bremen, Germany, Passenger Lists, 1904–1914,” entry for Anna Hurkala, age 13, female, born 1888, residence Littmanova, arrived Baltimore, Maryland, August 1901.

A Village Already Moving

Those of you following this series from the beginning have already met Anastasia Hlinka and heard what life in Litmanova demanded of a family. The conditions pushing families out of the Kingdom of Hungary were relentless. By 1901, the wave of Litmanova immigration to Pennsylvania was already well underway. Neighbors were going. The Marcisak family was going. Friends were going.

The question for the Hurkala family was no longer whether to leave. It was how, and when, and in what order.

Her father Constantinus had left first, departing Bremen on June 28, 1900, on the H.H. Meier and arriving in Baltimore the following month. He was one of countless Litmanova men who immigrated to Pennsylvania ahead of their families to find work and establish a foothold. Then, in the summer of 1901, it was Anna's turn. Her mother Anastasia's timing remains less certain — she was in Pennsylvania by 1903, when the family's son Michael was born there, but exactly when she crossed we don't yet know.

Not Quite Alone

Anna did not cross entirely alone. Several people from Litmanova were on the SS Gera with her,² likely bound for the same Pennsylvania coal towns that had drawn so many from their village. In the cramped steerage quarters, those familiar faces from home mattered more than the manifest could record. Chain migration worked this way: each crossing made the next one survivable because someone from your own village had already made the journey.

She was still thirteen, in a foreign port, without her parents on the ship. The manifest recorded her destination. It did not record what she felt.

Baltimore, Then Pennsylvania

Unlike the New York arrivals processed through Ellis Island, both Constantinus and Anna entered the United States through Baltimore. She arrived. She cleared the arrival process. She

found her parents in Pennsylvania coal country.

The records carry her that far, and then go quiet for a few years.

Anna in America

Within two years of arriving in Baltimore, Anna married Vasil Marcisak — a young man from Litmanova who had made his own crossing just months before she did. She was approximately fifteen years old. They settled in Pennsylvania coal country, raised a large family, and eventually made their way to New York. Her younger sister Katharine eventually followed, arriving in 1908, and married Nicolaus Marcisak — the brother of Anna's own husband.

She became Babi. My great-grandmother. I knew her briefly, early in my childhood, before she died when I was about six. I have impressions now, not clear memories. What I wish I had are the questions I didn't know to ask when I was small.

Think about that span: the thirteen-year-old in steerage on the SS Gera, and the elderly woman who was Babi. The same person. A life stretching from the Carpathian foothills of the Kingdom of Hungary to a Brooklyn household full of grandchildren.

The Quiet Kind of Agency

I've written about a woman with agency. A woman who made a choice that altered her path.

I want to be honest about what the records show. Constantinus and Anastasia made the decisions that brought their family to America. They went first. They were waiting in Pennsylvania

when Anna arrived. The manifest records her destination as her parents — their decision, at least in part.

And yet: she went. She crossed. She arrived. Two years later, she chose the man she would spend her life with — a man from home, a familiar face in an unfamiliar country. Anna Hurkala's immigration story was shaped by forces larger than herself — the poverty of the Kingdom of Hungary, the pull of Litmanova immigration to Pennsylvania, the parents already waiting on the other side of the ocean. But within those forces, she made a life. Those choices, some constrained and some freer, built something that reached forward more than a century to reach me.

That is the quiet kind of agency the records almost never name. But it is agency just the same.

1. "Bremen, Germany, Passenger Lists, 1904–1914," database with images, Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 13 July 2025), entry for Anna Hurkala, age 13, female, born 1888, residence Littmanova, arrived Baltimore, Maryland, August 1901, ship *Gera*; citing passenger list page 261, Bremen passenger departure records.
2. Ibid.

IV

The Woman I Inherited

Inheritance does not always arrive in the form of money or property. More often it travels as posture, as instinct, as a way of moving through the world that you recognize in yourself before you can name where it came from.

The Woman I Inherited

Inheritance does not always arrive in the form of money or property. More often it travels as posture, as instinct, as a way of moving through the world that you recognize in yourself before you can name where it came from. It comes through in the way a grandmother walks up to strangers without fear. In the restraint of a woman who held her tongue when she had every right to use it. In the 1% of DNA that carries the echo of a woman whose name was never recorded.

The stories in Part 4 ask a quieter, more personal question than the earlier parts: not what these women survived, but what they left behind in the women who came after them. What do we carry forward without knowing we are carrying it?

These are their stories.

Julia Dowling Sten and Eva Marcisak Dubinsky, by Kirsten M. Max-Douglas, is a meditation on two grandmothers photographed together three days after Kirsten's birth, and on what the author recognizes, decades later, as the inheritance both women left her: the posture of showing up, over and over, no matter what the circumstances require. One grandmother was rooted in a Brooklyn house her own great-grandmother had spent forty years building. The other had crossed an ocean at thirteen. Both arrived, in different ways, at the same essential

strength.

Anne Epstein Mooney, by Fran Davis, traces the inheritance of a grandmother who refused to speak badly about her ex-husband to her daughters, who walked up to a group of Harley-Davidson riders outside a country store, and who passed down something harder to name than a rule: a preference for complexity, a refusal to let other people's pain become a verdict, a code for moving through the world with fairness instead of gossip.

The Unknown Woman, by Xanthe Hall, follows a DNA result, just 1%, back through generations of Anglo-Indian ancestry to a woman who will almost certainly never have a name in any record: an Indian woman, most likely Eurasian, who gave a child to a soldier of the East India Company and set in motion a maternal line that stretched forward through colonial India, through Simla and Bengal and Calcutta, to Xanthe Hall standing in a Berlin art museum arguing with her mother about colonialism. This is the story of the women the records erased, and the inheritance they left anyway.

Together, these three essays remind us that the women we inherited are not only the ones whose names appear in the documents. Some of them travel in our bodies. Some of them live in the way we treat other people. Some of them we are still learning to recognize.

Strong Women

by Kirsten M. Max-Douglas

Our Growing Family Tree

<https://ourgrowingfamilytree.com>

Julia Dowling Sten – My Paternal Grandmother and Eva Marcisak Dubinsky – My Maternal Grandmother.

I have always called it the “strong women” photo. It was taken three days after I was born.



Strong Women. 1969.

Four generations of women in one frame.

Even before I had the language for it, I understood what I was looking at. These were women who showed up.

This week's prompt asks about inheritance. The values and patterns that travel through generations without a word being spoken.

I inherited something from two grandmothers. I am still figuring out exactly what to call it. But it starts with showing up.

Eva: Born Into Hard Times

Eva Marcisak was born on May 15, 1911, in Mount Braddock, a small coal mining town in Fayette County, Pennsylvania. She was a twin. Her brother Adam did not survive infancy. Her mother, Anna Hurkala, had crossed the Atlantic alone at thirteen, and her father Vasil had built a life in the Pennsylvania coalfields through sheer persistence.

Eva grew up in that world: close-knit, hard-working, immigrant Byzantine Catholic, shaped by the rhythm of the mines and the mutual dependence of families who had very little and shared it anyway.

By 1930 she was in New York, working. Through the Depression years she took whatever work was available: clerk, cleaner, waitress. Never stopping, never settling.

She married George Dubinsky in September 1945. She was thirty-four years old. Their daughter, my mother, arrived in 1947. Their son followed two years later. Eva was thirty-six and thirty-eight. She had built her family on the far side of a long road.

We called her Moms. The name fit. She was the anchor. Strong-willed is the word I reach for when I try to describe her. When I think about what I inherited from my grandmothers, Eva comes first.

She had spent her entire life doing exactly what I now recognize as inheritance: showing up, over and over, no matter what the circumstances required.

I am strong-willed too. I have been told this my entire life. I believe I came by it honestly.

Julia: Rooted in Brooklyn

Julia Elizabeth Dowling was born in 1907 in the Brooklyn house where she would spend her entire life. She grew up in a household that expanded and contracted around her: parents, siblings, aunts, a great-aunt who stayed for decades. That house was never quiet and never simple. Managing life inside it required a particular kind of steadiness.

Julia developed her own kind of steadiness. She worked. In 1930, she was an addressographer in a broker's office. By 1940, she was a typist. She built a professional life in an era when many women were expected not to. She married my grandfather David Sten, a Swedish immigrant and WWII veteran, and had her first child, my father, in 1944, when she was thirty-seven. Her daughter followed when Julia was nearly forty.

She filled her life the same way she filled that house: work, community, and a steady presence in everything she did. Before she married, she sang, and apparently did it with enough enthusiasm that a newspaper took notice.

I do not sing. This trait did not make the journey.

But this photograph did:

STRONG WOMEN



Julia Dowling Sten & Kirsten (Sten) Max-Douglas, 1970

There she is: Julia Dowling Sten, crossing guard, standing her post. She died when I was seven. I do not remember her well.

But I have this photo, and I have the stories.

She was born in 1907. The crossing guard photo is from the 1970s. That is sixty-plus years of showing up.

What I Inherited from My Grandmothers

Eva and her mother Anna were survivors in the most literal sense. They came from hard places: the Carpathian foothills, the Pennsylvania coalfields, the New York tenements during the Depression, and they built lives on the other side of each difficulty. Their strength was forged in displacement and scarcity.

Julia's strength grew from a different soil. She had the Brooklyn house, the family network, the stability that Mary Plunkett Dowling had spent forty years building. Her strength was the strength of rootedness, of a woman who knew exactly where she came from and used that foundation to reach outward.

Two different lives, built on the same instinct: show up and keep going.

The Posture I Inherited

I think about what I inherited from my grandmothers and keep returning to the same answer. I did not inherit Julia's singing voice. I did not inherit Eva's china pattern preferences, though I treasure the china itself. What I inherited from my grandmothers is the posture: work hard, be present, show up, and find the joy in it.

Both grandmothers worked before motherhood and did not stop being fully themselves after it. Both married later than

the convention of their era and raised their children with intention. Both lived in Brooklyn, loved their families, and left an impression on the people around them that outlasted them.

I have been a paralegal for thirty years. I am also a professional genealogist, a blogger, and a constant student of this work. I had my son at twenty-eight and kept my career while raising him. I show up for this work every week, even when the research is slow and the answers are elusive.

And when I watch my mother now, managing everything she manages with that particular quiet strength, I recognize it. She got it from Eva. Eva carried it from a coal mining town in Pennsylvania, through the tenements of New York, to a home and family she built on the far side of a long road.

I am fairly certain I know where I got it too.

They showed up.

That is what I carry forward

1. George Dubinsky, photographer, slide photograph of Anna Hurkala Marcisak, Eva Marcisak Dubinsky, and Kirsten M. Max-Douglas's mother with newborn Kirsten M. Max-Douglas, Brooklyn, New York, 23 August 1969; Max-Douglas Family Papers, privately held by Kirsten M. Max-Douglas, [ADDRESS FOR PRIVATE USE,] Blue Ash, Ohio, 2026.
2. Thomas Sten, photographer, slide photograph of Julia Elizabeth Dowling Sten with Kirsten M. Max-Douglas in stroller, Brooklyn, New York, October 1970; Max-Douglas Family Papers, privately held by Kirsten M. Max-Douglas, [ADDRESS FOR PRIVATE USE,] Blue Ash, Ohio, 2026.

Anne's No-Gossip Code

by Fran Davis

The Past, Still Present

<https://thepaststillpresent.substack.com>

In families, gossip can sound like intimacy. Lean in close. Trade a story. Feel like you belong to the inner circle.

My maternal grandmother, Anne Epstein Mooney, didn't buy that bargain.

I don't remember her delivering a dramatic speech about it. I remember it as a way of moving through the world—quiet, consistent, almost stubborn. She didn't traffic in other people's worst moments. She didn't build closeness by tearing someone else down. She had what I can only call a moral preference for first-hand knowledge.

It showed up most clearly after my grandparents divorced.

My mother told me that her mother never spoke badly about her father. Not to win sympathy. Not to recruit her daughters to her side. Not to edit the story so it would land cleanly. She

believed her daughters needed to figure out their relationship with him on their own.

That is not the easy choice. The easy choice is the one many of us understand instinctively: if you've been hurt, you get to narrate the hurt. You get to tell the story in a way that protects you. You get to build an alliance with your children that says, "We're the ones who know the truth."

My grandmother chose something harder: restraint.

Not denial. Not pretending everything was fine. Restraint—the discipline of not letting her pain turn into a story her daughters had to inherit.

In that one choice, I can see the architecture of a whole worldview. She trusted her daughters. She respected their right to arrive at their own conclusions. And she understood something that takes a long time to learn: when you speak badly about someone to a child who loves them, you aren't only describing a person. You're putting a thumb on the scale of a relationship.

She didn't do that.

When I think about the kind of strength that takes, it isn't loud strength. It's not the kind that makes an entrance. It's the kind that keeps your mouth clean when you'd be justified—socially, emotionally, even morally—in letting it get dirty.

And then there's the smaller story. The one that makes me laugh now.

We were in upstate New York near our summer house—me, a kid about 8 or 10 years old, still operating on kid logic where the world is full of clear categories: safe and unsafe, good and bad, people you approach and people you avoid.

We stopped at a country store. There was a group of Harley-Davidson riders outside—black leather, tattoos, the whole

visual language that told my nervous little body: danger.

Before I could finish my silent prayer that my grandmother would stay close to me, she walked right up to them and started a conversation.

I remember watching in horror, convinced something would happen to her. Convinced she didn't understand what I understood.

But she understood something I didn't.

She held no preconceived ideas about people. Or maybe it's more accurate to say: she refused to let preconceived ideas do her thinking for her. She wanted to figure people out herself.

As an adult, I realize how rare that is. We live in a culture that teaches us to make snap judgments and then call them wisdom. We confuse pattern recognition with truth. We use other people's opinions as shortcuts—not just about strangers in leather jackets, but about our own family members, our neighbors, the “difficult” person everyone warns us about at a party.

My grandmother didn't take the shortcut.

I don't know what she and those riders talked about. It almost doesn't matter. The point is that she approached them like human beings, not like symbols. She didn't need them to be saints. She didn't need them to be scary. She needed them to be real.

And in that moment, I got a glimpse of the same principle that shaped the post-divorce silence: other people deserve the dignity of direct contact. Not rumor. Not performance. Not a story told *about* them in their absence.

That's what I inherited.

Not only the anti-gossip rule—though I did inherit that desire, even if I don't always live up to it. Gossip is a hard habit to resist.

It moves fast, it feels like intimacy, and most of us know what it's like to say something we shouldn't have. I've noticed the pull most in the moments when gossip is offered as a social handshake. The moment when you're supposed to nod along, laugh at the right parts, signal that you know the "real" story of someone. I still feel the temptation. But I also feel something my grandmother planted: an internal refusal. I don't want closeness that costs someone else their fairness.

I also inherited something bigger: a preference for complexity.

That inheritance has quietly shaped the way I do genealogy. Records can make it easy to flatten people. A document gives you a fact and your brain supplies a verdict. A rumor becomes a label. A family story becomes a sentence you carry for decades.

But I've learned—partly through the work, and partly through her example—that people aren't verdicts. They're contexts. They're pressures and choices and accidents and patterns. And if I'm going to write about them, I want to do it with decency and a strong spine: honest, but not cruel; clear, but not simplistic.

Sometimes I think this is what women pass down when they can't pass down money or safety or ease. They pass down a code. A way to move through the world without becoming hardened by it.

My grandmother's code was simple: don't let gossip do your thinking. Don't recruit other people into your resentment. Meet people directly. Let your daughters decide. Let your own eyes decide.

When I was eight, I thought she was fearless because she walked up to strangers who looked dangerous.

Now I think she was fearless because she refused to turn anyone into a story that made her feel superior.

And in a world where that is the cheapest kind of power, she chose the expensive kind: fairness.

Unknown Woman

by Xanthe Hall

X-Factored - family stories

<https://xanthh.substack.com>

At the beginning of last year I got my DNA results from Ancestry. Nothing spectacular. Except for 1% from India.

That got me wondering: how? Who? Who was the woman I inherited this DNA from? Is my olive skin, that a little sun turns deep brown, my black hair, or my brown eyes — are they all from her?

When I was little, I thought my family was from India because my mother told me she was born there. She sometimes dressed me in a sari like her Ayah used to. My mother was beautiful and had the same brown eyes and thick black hair as me.

The Indian boy living upstairs in Dundee was called Shanu. We played together and I felt like we were the same, both from India. I hardly noticed that his skin was darker than mine.

Me and Shanu, abt. 1965. Photo: Hall family archive.



Me and Shanu, abt. 1965. Photo: Hall family archive.

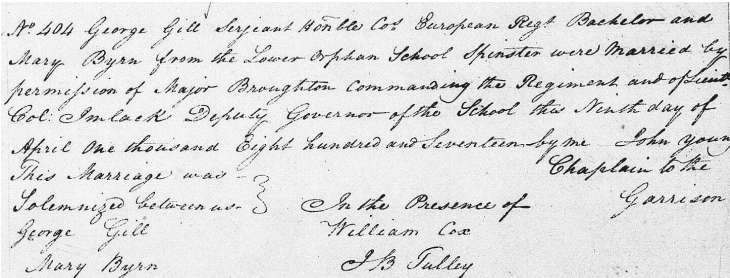
My mother's branch of the family is Anglo-Indian. I had no idea what that meant until I began to research that part of the family. The discovery that they were not just Anglo-Indian as defined by many as meaning: a British subject, born and brought up in India. No, my family was Eurasian, meaning that at some point in the past, the father was British and the mother was Indian.

The woman I inherited my Indian DNA from remains hidden, elusive, out of sight. Maybe she is my 4x great-grandmother, the mother of Mary Byrn. Or maybe another generation further back, I don't know. Women like her were a practical solution

for the lonely soldier of the John Company¹. She might have been a camp follower, washing his clothes or cooking for him. He might have taken her to his bed and given her a child. If she was lucky, he took her to the chapel, had her baptised and married her. Or he didn't. She might have been just a young girl, perhaps 14 or 15.

Most of the men that married native or Eurasian women were not officers, they belonged to the rank and file of the East India Company (EIC) Army. Many were men coming from the poorer parts of Britain and Ireland, looking for a steady income and maybe some adventure.

My 3x great-grandfather George Gill, a weaver from Bradford, was recruited to the Bengal Army European Regiment and became a Sergeant. He married Mary Byrn from the Lower Orphan School (LOS) in Calcutta. They married on 9 Apr 1817 in Fort William. Permission was given by the Deputy Governor of the school, Lieutenant-Colonel Imlack and the Regimental Commander Major Broughton. Mary was about 16 and George, 20.



*No 406 George Gill Sergeant Honble Col. European Regt Bachelor and
Mary Byrn from the Lower Orphan School Spinster were married by
permission of Major Broughton Commanding the Regiment and of Lieut
Col. Imlack Deputy Governor of the School the Ninth day of
April One thousand Eight Hundred and Seventeen by me John Young
This Marriage was Solemnized between us } Chaplain to the
George Gill } Garrison
Mary Byrn } William Cox
J B Tulley*

Marriage record for George Gill and Mary Byrn, 9 Apr 1817.

The Lower Orphan Schools were not only for orphans but for all the children of soldiers in the field, whether legitimate or not. Almost all of the mothers of these children were native Indian women or Eurasians². The family was given money to part with their children when they were about three or four years old, at the latest five. Various reasons were given for this practice: children were seen by the Company to be an encumbrance to troop movement; life in cantonments or camps was too harsh for children; it was essential to raise them as Christians (and stop the Indian women raising them in their conventions); it was better to give them institutional care otherwise they might become a “burden” on society. The development of their moral character and usefulness to the British — in particular the Company — was more likely in Christian hands.

Mary might have spoke little or no English, she was perhaps better suited to life in the cantonment than British. She may even have stolen school property or lied to the teachers, as school reports claimed of these children. But because the Eurasian children spoke the native languages and understood Indian behaviour, it was policy to train them to become intermediates between the British and Indians. Also, they were able to stand the heat of the sun at its hottest, unlike the British.

So they received a spartan education in the LOS, where learning the Christian faith was a major priority. The girls received almost no academic education but were prepared for marriage, or a life as a ladies maid. Needlework and housekeeping were more important than other kinds of learning.

When they were about 15 or so, the children from the LOS were found employment. The boys either went to an EIC³ army in subordinate positions or — due to their command of English which in 1833 became the official language of government

— administrative posts in local government⁴. The girls went into service, or they were married to a soldier. When a soldier wanted to marry he could visit the LOS and arrange to take one of the girls off their hands. Whether she really had much say in this arrangement is not clear. Sometimes the girls were only 14 or younger. In the period between 1782 and 1820, 497 of 1,390 girls were married in the LOS.

Almost all of these children — the so-called children of John Company — were Eurasians or, as they called themselves “East Indians” because they “belonged” to the East India Company. There were next to no European women available for marriage, and those that there were would not have been able to stand the heat and the conditions that soldier’s wives endured. Only 1 in 20 Englishmen had an English wife in 1800 in India and those that did were mostly officers or gentlemen. The ranks either took an Indian or a Eurasian wife.

Yet finding out who was Anglo-Indian is no easy matter, as the original Indian name of the mother was frequently not recorded. Added to this, only about 70% of the records exist in the British India Office. If my ancestor wanted to marry her soldier in a Protestant church, she would have to be baptised and receive an English or Biblical name, like Mary or Sarah, and drop her Indian name. She would also lose her caste if she was Hindu, becoming an outcast(e). Her family would reject her and she would become part of the John Company, producing children to fight for the British or to marry their soldiers and produce more soldiers, and so on.

This is what the woman I inherited my DNA from would have been like: hardy and stong, most likely poor, outcast by her family when she had a “half-caste” child, looked down upon by the British. I will most likely never know her name, but her

descendants are my family.

If a woman was born and brought up in India to a father in the rank and file of the EIC Army, it can safely be assumed that she was of mixed race ancestry on the distaff⁵ line. The maternal line of my family has only women born brought up in India: my mother (although she left in 1937 aged four, bound for England); my grandmother Norah was born in Simla, Punjab; my great-grandmother Flora was also born in Simla; my 2nd great-grandmother Martha was born in 1836 in the cantonment of Bareilly and was married to a Gunner of the John Company in Meerut, Bengal, when she was 16; my 3x great-grandmother Mary was born about 1800 and married a soldier of the John Company when she was 16. Before that, I can find no record.



From left to right: Daphne, Norah, Flora and Martha (no picture of Mary). Photos: Hall family archive.

Two of Mary and George's sons also married girls from Lower Orphan Schools. On 27 May 1850, William Gill, a widower

at 32, married 15 year-old Ann Dormer, a ward of the LOS in Allipore⁶. On the same day, his brother Robert married Mary Anne Flannery, also a ward of the LOS, 17 years old. Both brothers were soldiers in the 42nd Regiment of the Light (Native) Infantry, like their father before them.

All of Mary's daughters, except her youngest, married soldiers in the Native Infantry in positions such as Sergeant-Major or Quarter-Master. Three of them were very young (15-17) when they married.

Women and children were at the mercy of husbands and fathers, as well as the Company. The status of women was very low in Britain, and when racism was added to the mix, the contempt for the Eurasian reached a pinnacle in India. When travel to India became easier, because the steam ship was invented and an overland route was opened up, European women began to arrive. These women attempted to "refine" British India and disdained "those of that fellow countrymen who resiled from decent living, and lowered race prestige by self-indulgence" — a thinly-veiled criticism of men taking native or Eurasian wives.

About the time Mary was bringing up her children, slavery was still rife in India and young Indian girls were being sold for up to 100 rupees to be used as domestic servants. These girls would also be baptised and given Biblical names.

It wasn't until 1833 that the new reformed EIC charter provided for the abolition of slavery during the Earl Grey administration. Domestic slaves were apprenticed for a period of six years to be trained and then liberated. These took on the surnames of their masters, thus genealogically confusing the records and identifying as Eurasian when in fact wholly Indian.

My maternal line became successively less Eurasian and more

British by marrying English, Irish or Welsh men. The Indian line has been watered down to the 1% that resides in me today. Most Anglo-Indian families left India at independence, fearing that they would be badly treated if they stayed. Only about 300,000 remained. The Anglo-Indian were never accepted as Indian, their mother tongue is English, they are Christian, and still to be found all over India, as well as all over the world.

My Indian 4 or 5x great-grandmother is like an echo calling out from the deep past. She speaks of ostracism and racism, of poverty and desperation, of subjection — even abuse — of birthing and losing babies, travelling with an army, perhaps losing her husband to an unsuccessful military campaign, and searching for another to take care of her and her children. And then the Company taking her children away to be “educated”, to make them more British while at the same time fearing and disdaining their ethnic background. Those children were an encumbrance, an extra cost over which public discussion was made as to whether to deport them to England, rather than educating all the “needy children of John Company”.

I remember standing with my mother in an art museum in Berlin in the early 1990s and arguing about colonialism. The exhibition placed colonial art next to indigenous art, painting two very different pictures and perspectives on colonialism. I was appalled and angry at our colonial past. My mother said: it’s complicated.

The Eurasians fell between those two groups: between the ruling class and the ruled. Class distinction, ever the mark of British society, made Eurasians their working class. They had, in some cases, less rights than the Indians. The British were paternalistic in their rule of India, wanting to educate the Indian and “better” him, eventually giving him a job in provincial

government. The Eurasians were lucky if they got the job of teaching him but mostly they had to look out for themselves. Reading around the subject, the sense of community amongst Anglo-Indians is palpable.

In these days of critical whiteness and understanding our privilege, I want to afford my Indian and Eurasian ancestral women the honour they deserve. They are the forgotten women who helped to build Mother India, unrecognised for their contribution and still hidden in the records.

Herbert Alick Stark writes of being Anglo-Indian: "If England is the land of our fathers, India is the land of our mothers" My distaff line reflects this sentiment: Daphne, Norah, Flora, Martha and Mary are living proof of it. And beyond them lies the woman I inherited.

Want to know more about this subject? Here are some more books and articles that I looked at while writing this post:

- Anthony, Frank: Britain's Betrayal in India, 1969
- Charles, Geraldine: The Children of John Company, 2009
- Hawes, Christopher J: Poor Relations, 2006
- Moore, Gloria J: A Brief History of the Anglo-Indians, 1988
- Stark, Herbert Alick: Hostages to India, 1926

1 The name given to the East India Company by its employees.

2 Some were Luso-Asians, the progeny of mixed ancestry between Portuguese men and Indian women.

3 For a period between 1785 and 1833, however, the Company barred Eurasian men from joining the Army until the renewal of the Company's Charter removed all disqualifications based on caste, religion and race.

4 Later, in the 1880s, the Public Services Commission

reserved all provincial government posts for Indians, effectively taking away this occupation. Anglo-Indians sometimes became head teachers of Indian schools, leading to Indians being appointed to positions in local government.

5 Female line of descent, maternal branch of family tree. A distaff is a tool used for spinning wool. The term was used since the 14th century as a symbol for women's work. The distaff line was also called the 'spindle side' of the family; the male line was the 'spear side'. In 885 AD, King Alfred's will spoke of the 'sperehealfe' and 'spinhealfe'. [Grammarphobia: The Flip Side of Distaff, 21 Apr 2008]

6 British India Office Marriages, Reference: N-1-77; Folio: 291, William Gill, son of George Gill, marriage to Ann Dormer (15), child of Michael Dormer, on 27 May 1850 in Kidderpore, Bengal.

About the Contributing Authors

Xanthe Hall is a Scottish-German artist, writer, gardener, and actress who has spent most of her life working to make the world safer. For 33 years, she campaigned for nuclear disarmament with an NGO dedicated to the prevention of war — writing with urgency, precision, and purpose. Now, having stepped back from the front lines of political activism, her writing has turned inward: to family, memory, and the stories that outlast us.

Born in Scotland, raised in England, and long rooted in Berlin, Xanthe brings a distinctly transatlantic and cross-cultural lens to everything she does. She writes about her family history on her blog, *X-Factored - Family Stories*, where she has found a community of people who share her conviction that these stories matter — that they are worth preserving, sharing, and telling well.

She gives her work freely. She asks only that you don't copy it, and that you pass it on.

* * *

Lauren Maguire writes *The Heirloom Detective: Lulu Mackenzie of the Archives*, where she brings a former attorney's precision and a storyteller's instinct to the records. She began

her research journey fourteen years ago, driven by a desire to understand the legacy she was passing on — and hasn't stopped since. Drawn especially to the untold lives of women, Lauren “finds the friction” in documents others might skim past, reconstructing the past with a sensory, immersive style that makes history feel immediate. Her work follows Irish-American families — the Hendricksons, Sullivans, O'Briens, Fitzgeralds, and others — through the streets of New York and the landscapes of Long Island, threading their stories into a larger, living inheritance.

* * *

Kirsten M. Max-Douglas writes *Our Growing Family Tree* and is a genealogy enthusiast and aspiring accredited genealogist whose passion for family history began with a single unanswered question: who was her Swedish great-grandfather's grandfather? That curiosity has since grown into a wide-ranging pursuit across continents, centuries, and record collections — from Swedish church registers and Ellis Island passenger lists to DNA matches that continue to rewrite the story.

Kirsten researches ancestors across multiple immigrant lines, including Slovak coal miners and steelworkers (Marcisak, Hurkala, and Hlinka families), Polish immigrants from Austrian Galicia (Dubnianski, Knyz, and Kowalski) — many of Carpatho-Rusyn heritage — Swedish farming families from Kristianstad and Näsum, and Irish roots in County Meath through the Dowling and Plunkett lines. She is also actively tracing families connected to Burke County, North Carolina.

* * *

Melody Lasalle is the author of the popular blog, *MelRootsNWrites* and is the Site Manager of **YourIslandRoutes.com**, a genealogy resource celebrating over two decades of connecting families to their island roots. What began as a simple project to help her grandmother record family history grew into a sprawling collection of binders, documents, and research notes — and a lifelong passion for uncovering the past.

Melody specializes in Hawaiian, Californian, Massachusetts (particularly the Fall River region), Azorean, and French research. Her own Portuguese ancestry traces to the villages of Achada and Nordeste on São Miguel Island, Azores, where her ancestors departed during the sugar plantation migration and eventually settled in Kilauea, Kauai, working for the Kilauea Sugar Plantation.

A dedicated community volunteer, Melody served as the Portuguese Hawaiian research specialist for AOL's Golden Gate Genealogy Forum from 1997 to 2003 and continued that work with the spinoff site GenealogyForum.org through 2008. During that time, she led the volunteer indexing project for *Portuguese Hawaiian Memories* by J.F. Freitas — indexes now available on YourIslandRoutes.com. She is currently a co-moderator of the Azorean Genealogy Google Group and moderates the Portuguese Hawaiian Genealogy group on Facebook.

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Anne Wendel has been a genealogist since childhood, tracing family branches long before she knew the word for it. Growing up in a home where relatives gathered from across the country, she learned early that “cousin” was never enough of an answer — she needed to know exactly who came from whom, and why it mattered.

After staying up past her bedtime to watch *Roots*, she launched her first serious genealogy search at age 14, interviewing elderly aunts, sneaking into archives underage, and filling out family group sheets in pencil. A lifelong lover of history, she has always been captivated by the way a place — or a family — transforms when the only variable is time.

A retired teacher, wife, and mother, Anne now devotes herself to the three Rs she loves most: reading history, researching ancestors, and writing about it. She is the author of the blog *Grandma’s Granny’s Family Album* and is a featured panel member of *GenClub*.

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Fran Davis is the writer behind *The Past, Still Present*, a blog dedicated to the art and practice of family history research. Fran came to genealogy not to collect names on a tree, but to understand the people who shaped them — and what those lives still cast forward into the present.

Drawing on archival records, personal reflection, and a deep commitment to honoring ordinary lives, Fran writes narrative histories that hold poverty, migration, and endurance with equal parts rigor and compassion. Their work explores the margins and omissions of the historical record, the silences that would not stay sealed, and finds in them something worth

hearing.

Through ancestral stories, personal essays, and behind-the-scenes field notes on the research process, Fran invites readers into the slow, surprising work of listening: to documents, to absences, and to the strange tenderness of what survives.

About the Editor

Robin Stewart is a genealogist, curator, and writer who has spent more than forty years immersed in family history. She is the founder of Genealogy Matters, a Substack publication that shines a light on the best genealogy blogs, newsletters, podcasts, and books, and the creator of GenStack Coterie a community for writers, researchers, educators, and content creators who see genealogy and family history as stewardship: a responsibility to preserve, interpret, and carry family stories forward.

Through GenStack, Robin has spent years curating and connecting the family history writing community, creating space for the stories of ordinary ancestors to be recognized as part of the broader social record. Her challenges, including Storyteller Tuesday, have invited writers to move beyond the family tree and into the work of narrative: writing stories that honor complexity, acknowledge uncertainty, and make ancestral lives visible.

The *GenStack Ancestral Women 2026* ebook grew directly from one of those challenges. In March 2026, during Women's History Month, six writers from across the GenStack community responded to four weekly prompts, each exploring a different dimension of ancestral women's lives: endurance after loss, the invisible labor of holding a family together, the exercise of agency and choice, and the inheritance that passes across

generations. The stories gathered here are the result of that shared effort.

Robin is the author of *Creative Agency: How Family History Content Creators Can Navigate Creative Difficulty and Build Lasting Capacity*, a framework for sustaining stewardship work over time. Drawing on research in self-efficacy, habit formation, values-based action, and emotional regulation, the book offers family history writers practical language and tools for remaining engaged with work that carries real weight.

She is also completing *Stewardship Matters: A Storyteller's Guide to Preserving Family History*, a book for experienced family historians who are ready to shift from private research to public stewardship. The book addresses the full arc of that transition: writing the story, establishing credibility, publishing in formats built to last, and making work findable for future researchers and family members.

Robin lives and works at the intersection of genealogy, writing, and community. She believes that family history stories are not peripheral to social history. They are essential to it.

You can find her at genealogymatters.substack.com and genstackcoterie.substack.com.

